

A WORKSHOP OF DREAMS

AMÉRICO EMÍLIO ROMI,
adventures of a pioneer



Text by Ignácio de Loyola Brandão



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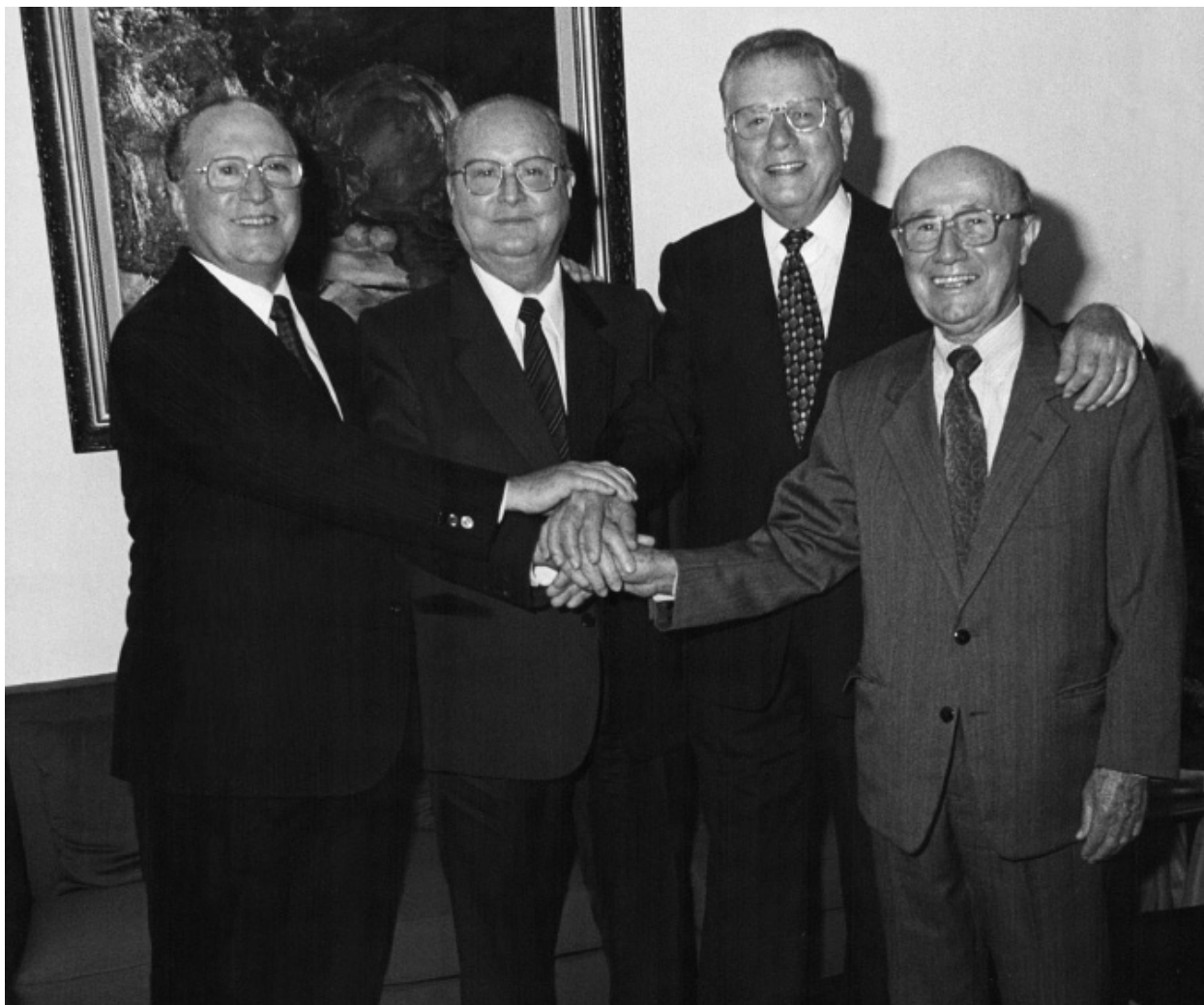
AMÉRICO EMÍLIO ROMI, ADVENTURES OF A PIONEER



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*From left to right: Romeu,
Giordano, Álvares, and Carlos*

DEAR READER,

Throughout the 20th century, Brazil underwent profound transformations, going from an eminently agricultural country to one of the largest industrialized economies of the present day.

Romi not only followed that process, but also played a prominent role in the realization of these changes, firstly by becoming the largest Brazilian agricultural machinery manufacturer; then effectively contributing to industrializing the nation by consolidating as one of its largest capital goods manufacturers.

The story of this revolution is revealed in these pages. With an expressive text written by Ignácio de Loyola Brandão, *A Workshop of Dreams – Américo Emílio Romi, Adventures of a Pioneer* fulfills our desire that Romi's story as well as that of its founders reaches the hands not only of our employees, clients, suppliers, and shareholders, but also the community as a whole. In addition to the pleasure it provides, reading this book allows us to understand how Romi's values were constructed and how they form the foundations of our greatest of wealth—the integrity of the relationship with our different publics.

By perusing the texts and images that record the highlights of this story, the reader will be able to experience *seu* Emílio's [*seu*, in Brazil, is an informal title used with the given name, which denotes both respect and affection; that is how he was affectionally called by those with whom he lived] pioneering spirit and innovations right from the tougher times of the modest beginning of the undertaking, up to the more prosperous times with the advent of modern industry in the country.

Good reading!



INDÚSTRIAS ROMI S.A.

Livaldo Aguiar dos Santos
Director-President

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Máquinas Agrícolas Romi, 1940s





ANDEREMO IN AMERICA,
IN TEL BEL BRASILE...



*Anderemo in America,
In tel bel Brasile,
E qua i nostri siori
Lavorerà la terra col badil!*

*Let's go to America,
To beautiful Brazil,
And here our employers
Will till the land by hoe.*

Policarpo Romi looked around him. He was aware that many friends, many families were leaving. They were seeking a future in other lands. He is a daring and decided man, but thinks to himself: Is it worth leaving all this behind? What if the situation changes? What if the chosen place,

the Promised Land is just an illusion? He struggled with his doubts, uncertainties, and anxieties. He was born and raised in Rapolano Terme, in the heart of Tuscany, birthplace of the Renaissance. He knows he needs to make up his mind, and quickly. In his country, in that half of the 1890s, there were no longer any signs of past and enlightened glories. Rapolano, a few kilometers away from Siena, was more like a *paese*, a village, that had always survived from its ancient thermal springs and marble quarries and was now deeply submerged in the crisis.

Even though Italy had been united in 1870, hopes of prosperity had not come to fruition. For Policarpo and so many others, reality was the financial crisis, social convulsion. Evermore Italians were migrating, seeking better lives in America—in the United States, Brazil, Argentina, and so many

other places. For a few decades now, with the decline of slave labor, Brazil was seeking European laborers. The government was subsidizing immigration, and well orchestrated and seductive propaganda painted Brazil as a paradise, *tel bel Brasile*.

Policarpo, the son of Francesco and Assunta Marcelina, had the spirit of an adventurer and a dreamer. If it wasn't for his father, he would have gone on an expedition to the South Pole, from which no one returned. Descriptions of him depict a strong and athletic man. As a discerning person, he was a man of few words—however; he was a fanatic socialist, firing up when the subject was politics. Despite living in the country, he was educated and had notions of mechanics.

In 1895, he married twenty-year-old Regina Seppia, the daughter of Iacopo Seppia and Mariana Magini. She was very pretty with fair hair and blue eyes, she was energetic, outspoken,

and an extrovert, features that she would carry with her for her entire life. Tuscans were not highly prone to emigrating, but Policarpo, notwithstanding his natural hesitations, was anxious for America. At the end of that year they came to Brazil. They probably embarked at Piombino. They disembarked in Santos, as was standard routine for immigrants.

Brazil was experiencing its first years of Republic. The Romis, who neither spoke the language nor understood the country's situation (where the Canudos War was beginning to make the headlines), had but one objective: settle and start their lives. They passed through the Immigrants Hostel, the triage center in São Paulo, where they remained while they contacted agents from the farms. Then, they joined a group that was traveling on to São José do Rio Pardo, 260 kilometers from the São Paulo state capital.

*Pages 8 and 9:
Mogiana locomotive*

*Previous page: Companhia de
Estrada de Ferro e Agrícola Santa
Bárbara, 1910s*

During the ocean passage, upon hearing conversations and snippets from the crew (who had experience in navigating with immigrants), they realized the truth: nothing was going to be a bed of roses. They would work from sunup to sundown, almost like slaves. Once in the interior of São Paulo, a farm foreman made a move on Regina, and Policarpo was obliged to harshly face him off.

São José do Rio Pardo was part of the coffee-producing front served by the Mogiana railway. Most of the Italians there were Venetians, with a scattering from other regions. The contract provided that, in addition to working the farmer's land, each family would initially receive a first-class brick-and-mortar house and then have the right to a plot of land for subsistence. Policarpo was greatly dismayed: the house was a shack in ruins, made of *pau-a-pique* [lathe and mud] and covered with thatch, on the banks of the Pardo River. The immigrant was obliged to rebuild everything with his own hands in his spare time (which was very scarce).

He worked as a laborer, and less than six months after having arrived in Brazil, on June 26, 1896, an old midwife from the state of Bahia, *sinhá* [typically Brazilian expression, used by slaves; it was a respectful way of referring to the mistress of the household, somewhat equivalent to 'Missus'] Quitéria, arrived at the farm. It was a cold night and the wind whistled through the lathe work of the walls. The boy was born

shortly afterwards. Policarpo wanted to call him Américo, in honor of the continent and Amerigo Vespucci, an Italian whose name was given to the New World. Regina didn't like it, she preferred Emílio. Thus, the boy was named Américo Emílio. However, each one called him in their own way. The mother was closer to the boy, and hence in everyday life the name Emílio prevailed.

Each cent Policarpo and Regina earned was transformed into British pound sterling, the solid currency of the time. It was European culture. Without a safe or a bank, cash was placed in a sock which was then knotted. They saved a small amount and, in 1897, they moved to the center of São José. They opened a small store, and later a general repair workshop. With his meager tools, Policarpo, who was a talented artisan, made kettles, pots, watering cans, and drinking mugs to sell. He knew how to work with furniture and, within the family, would cut everyone's hair.

In the workshop, Emílio would crawl around on the floor between nails, screws, and scrap iron, exasperating his mother. There in that workshop, watching his father busy with his tools, the boy learnt to walk.

At the beginning of 1897, the big sensation in the city was the arrival of iron segments imported from Germany for the new bridge, which in the eyes of that humble population appeared gigantic. In that almost provincial village, the bridge meant entertainment, and a visit to the undertaking was a



São José do Rio Pardo,
early 20th century



delight. The bridge was inaugurated in December; however, with January's torrential rains, the support pillars subsided and the construction sank. The undertaking's inspector, an honest man whose pride had been hurt by the disaster, fought to be appointed director of reconstruction. He was engineer Euclides da Cunha [renowned Brazilian writer and sociologist, whose account of the Canudos War, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, is a classic of Brazilian literature] who had settled in the city with his wife and children, and started to dismantle the parts.

One can't say that Policarpo was friends with Euclides, who was a taciturn and introverted man, whose time was taken by the bridge and notes for a book he was writing. However, there were contacts. Family references are vague. Euclides spent his day amongst the workers, and it seems that Policarpo was one of the Italians who worked under him or that the engineer frequently sought Policarpo's workshop. Euclides rebuilt the bridge and, years later, finished the book—*Rebellion in the Backlands*, one of the greatest classics of Brazilian literature.

At the turn of the century, Policarpo and Regina already had two daughters, Assumpta and Maria. The Pardo River region was hit by smallpox and yellow fever, killing by the hundreds. There was an exodus, and the Romis moved to Casa Branca, a few kilometers to the South. Policarpo managed to secure a job with the Mogiana railway much to his son's delight: steam-engine train driver. His father was a hero.

*Previous page: Top, fallen metallic bridge, São José do Rio Pardo, 1898; bottom, the new bridge and shed where Euclides da Cunha (below, center) wrote part of *Rebellion in the Backlands*, early 20th century*



*Santa Casa de Misericórdia hospital,
Casa Branca, early 20th century*

It was the heyday of the railway. Seeing his father in the engine cabin, lit up by the boiler furnace, made a marking impression on Emílio from four to ten years of age. Twice a week, the locomotive was brought to a stop on a bypass to be cleaned and lubricated, and the boy would spend the day with Policarpo. He grew up learning how to operate the brakes and slowly release the locomotive, to read steam pressure and water level, know the precise time to feed the furnace. In the eyes of the child, it was pure poetry, adventure.

However, reality was harsh. Many of the employees had died in the epidemics, and their positions were not filled. The great majority worked under an oppressive regime, under violent foremen—working double shifts unable to complain, under penalty of being fired. The locomotive cabins were open, with average temperatures of 45°C, and offered very little protection from the wind and rain.



On wet and cold days, operators would be subject to a violent shock every time the furnace was opened, with temperatures amounting to 400°C. The blast was numbing. Policarpo contracted asthmatic bronchitis.

An economic crisis was afoot, farmers in debt did not pay wages, European immigrants escaped en masse to the big cities, competing with national labor. In 1906, Brazilian labor protection laws made it even more difficult for foreigners: now, required formalities were countless, such as legalized documents, work papers, and proof of aptitude.

Policarpo lost his job at the Mogiana and tried his luck in São Joaquim da Barra, where he opened another store. With the births of Adélia, Joaquim, Francisca, and Júlia, the family grew significantly, and now there were nine mouths to feed. Regina helped by working as a midwife, which she had learnt from *sinhá* Quitéria.

Soon there were rumors that there were openings at the new electric power plant in Casa Branca, and the Romis returned. At school, Emílio showed talent in mathematics and physics. There was also the machinery at the plant, which left yet another lasting impression on the boy.

Life was hard and Policarpo was a restless man. He had often heard about Goiás, vast and almost uninhabited backland,

where it was difficult to obtain food and utensils. Policarpo thought: Why not supply those markets, a mix of miners, stakeholders, cattle herders, and farmers? He was fascinated by pioneering. He began to travel to sell them salt, gunpowder, shot for hunting, pots and pans, cloth, and Emílio went with him on several occasions.

They would arrive at the Grande River by train. They formed wagon trains pulled by mules and crossed the waters. It was a long and difficult journey along paths opened by pickaxes and hoes. Outlaws were a threat: appearing suddenly on deserted roads, making ambushes in the hills and in difficult spots. Despite the danger there were rewards and the wagon trains grew ever larger, and business prospered. However, it required great effort and Policarpo's health got worse. The doctors were adamant: asthmatic bronchitis had no cure; the best would be a radical change of climate.

"Why don't you go back to Italy?"

There are those who also say that the decision to return was to give the children a better education. At the beginning of 1912, the family embarked for Genoa, and from there continued on to Rapolano Terme.

The cycle had been completed. Emílio now dived head-first into another reality.

American immigrants, Santa Bárbara, early 20th century





WAR, BRAZIL, REVOLUTION



Pages 20 and 21: Dispatching watermelons at the Vila Americana station, 1912

Emílio as a soldier and friend, 1916

Facing page: Santa Bárbara d'Oeste sugar mill, 1910s

Up to now we have accompanied Policarpo. From now on we will change our trajectory and follow a young sixteen-year-old boy who, having spent several months in Rapolano, went to his uncle's house in Milan, in order to attend a course for electronics technicians at night. In his 1914 exams, he achieved top grade with a paper on slide friction. His free time was dedicated to reading technical books and magazines.

Milan was a key city. It was the main railway junction in the country and had everything favoring industrialization, offering jobs and receiving migrants. There was a proliferation of textile, chemical, mechanical, food, and paper industries.

Suddenly, Europe found itself in the upheaval of conflict, which would become worldwide. In June 1914, the heir to the Austrian throne was assassinated, and shortly afterwards the continent was at war. Italy entered the war in 1915, and all youth of military age were enlisted. Emílio, who was nineteen years old, included. With all her forces and astuteness, Regina tried to prevent him from going, claiming that her son was Brazilian. However, *jus sanguinis* was to prevail—the principle by which the parents' nationality determines that of the child.

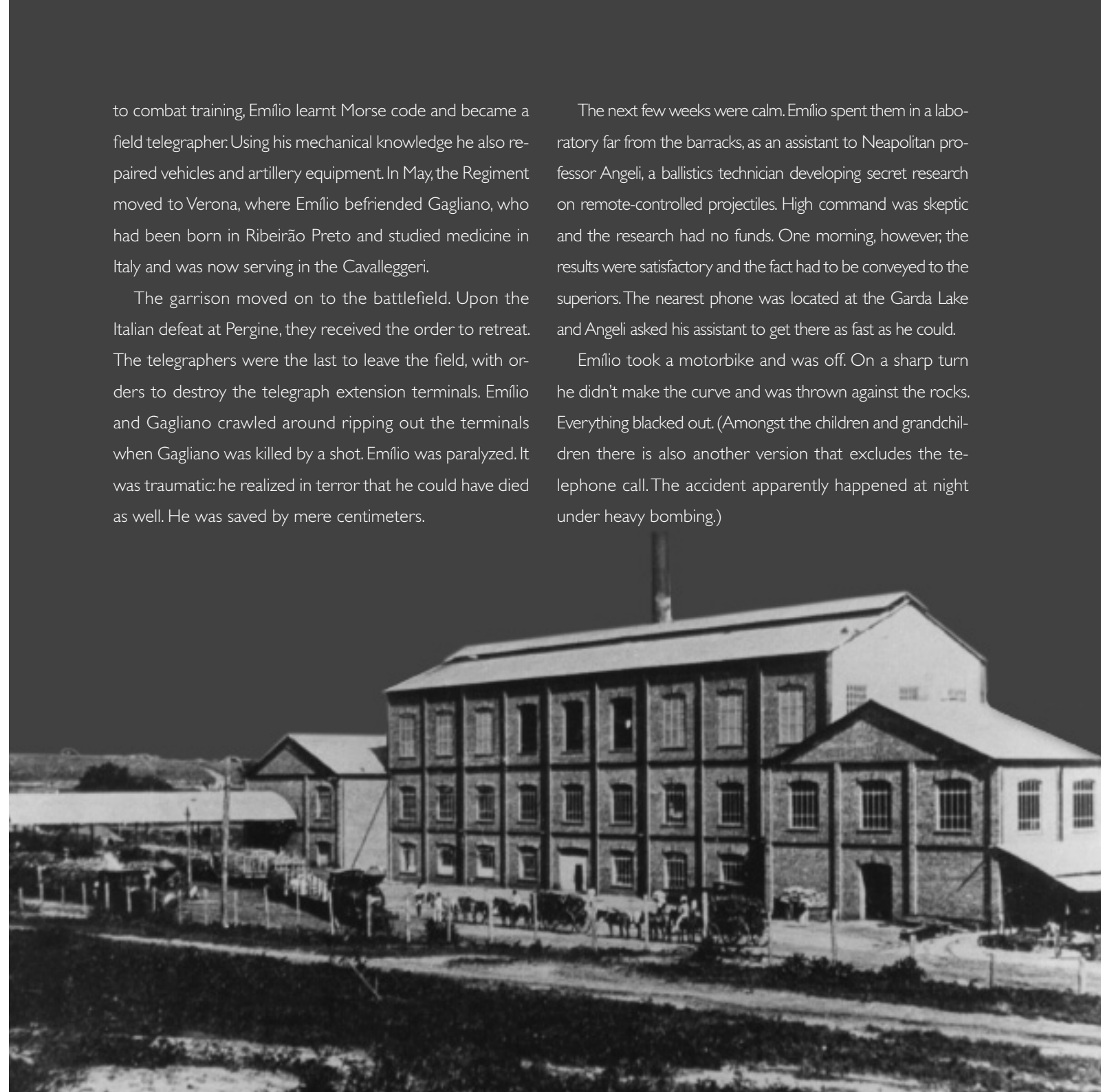
In January 1916, the *ragazzo brasiliano* presented himself to the Cavalleggeri di Aquila, a cavalry Regiment. In addition

to combat training, Emílio learnt Morse code and became a field telegrapher. Using his mechanical knowledge he also repaired vehicles and artillery equipment. In May, the Regiment moved to Verona, where Emílio befriended Gagliano, who had been born in Ribeirão Preto and studied medicine in Italy and was now serving in the Cavalleggeri.

The garrison moved on to the battlefield. Upon the Italian defeat at Pergine, they received the order to retreat. The telegraphers were the last to leave the field, with orders to destroy the telegraph extension terminals. Emílio and Gagliano crawled around ripping out the terminals when Gagliano was killed by a shot. Emílio was paralyzed. It was traumatic: he realized in terror that he could have died as well. He was saved by mere centimeters.

The next few weeks were calm. Emílio spent them in a laboratory far from the barracks, as an assistant to Neapolitan professor Angeli, a ballistics technician developing secret research on remote-controlled projectiles. High command was skeptic and the research had no funds. One morning, however, the results were satisfactory and the fact had to be conveyed to the superiors. The nearest phone was located at the Garda Lake and Angeli asked his assistant to get there as fast as he could.

Emílio took a motorbike and was off. On a sharp turn he didn't make the curve and was thrown against the rocks. Everything blacked out. (Amongst the children and grandchildren there is also another version that excludes the telephone call. The accident apparently happened at night under heavy bombing.)



*Carlos Chiti as a boy,
still in Italy*



EMÍLIO DISCOVERS THAT HE IS SIMPLY AMÉRICO

The boy asked the nurse:

“What’s your name?”

“Olímpia...”

“Where am I?”

“At the Samaritana hospital.”

“So, this is Florence. What happened?”

“You had an accident.”

“Was it serious?”

“You broke your right collarbone, an exposed fracture; the neck muscle was also affected. A little more and you wouldn’t be able to move your head.”

“How long have I been here?”

“Many days.”

“And before?”

“You lost a lot of blood and received a transfusion and then were removed to Verona. As you didn’t get better, you were brought here because we are more resourceful.”

From then on, every time he would wake up he would anxiously await the thin light-skinned nurse. The days passed with Emílio’s right side in a cast. It wasn’t a very good job and he ended up with a lump next to his collarbone.

One day, Emílio was a little more daring:

“Olímpia... Olímpia what?”

“Chiti,” she hesitated, her face darkened a little. “Maybe I should have said Gelli.”

“Why did you say Chiti?”

“My husband’s last name.”

“Husband? So, you’re married?” Emílio transpired a little disappointment.

“I was. He died. In the war.”

Grave and concentrated, Olímpia wasn’t much of a talker. Emílio changed the subject:

“Are you a professional nurse?”

“No, a volunteer.”

Emílio was strong and healthy, and his convalescence was speedy. Both had pleasure in each other’s company. He was energetic and talkative. She was also energetic, but prudent, measuring her words, saying only the essential. Like many other young girls of her age and class, she had presented herself as a volunteer. She lived in the hospital and, on her days off, she would go to her parents’ house. Her husband, Guido, had been a farm administrator leaving an only son—Carlos Chiti, aka Carleto, born in 1914. The boy stayed with relatives. Olímpia’s father was a landowner and had a warehouse in the Pistoia region and was from a traditional family.

By the time Emílio was released they were in love. Boldly, he declared himself. The answer was long in coming, because Olímpia needed time to think and because the customs of the day so required. Furthermore, she was two years older than Emílio and, with everything she had gone through, she

Olímpia Gelli, 1910s



was more mature. He was invited to spend some time at Napoleone and Ermelinda Lombardini Gelli's 120-hectare estate with its olive groves, vineyards, and nut orchards.

They scheduled the wedding for June 1917. Emílio wrote to São José do Rio Pardo requesting the necessary papers and returned to the Cavaleggeri. A letter from Brazil surprised the young man with this revelation: Emílio Romi did not exist. When his father registered his birth certificate at the registrar's office, he "forgot" to include the Emílio that his wife so liked and only registered Américo. Thus, Olímpia was going to marry Américo Romi. (The registration was only altered in 1945, now to Américo Emílio Romi, symbolically eliminating the divergence between his parents.)

Emílio managed to get a five-day leave, to spend them in Piacenza. He fought to be transferred to a unit in that city south of Milan, where they settled. The war ended and in 1919 Emílio got his discharge and moved with Olímpia and Carleto to Milan.

Emílio worked at Stigler, an elevator factory and following that at Brown-Boveri heavy industry, which ranked amongst the industrial giants in Italy.

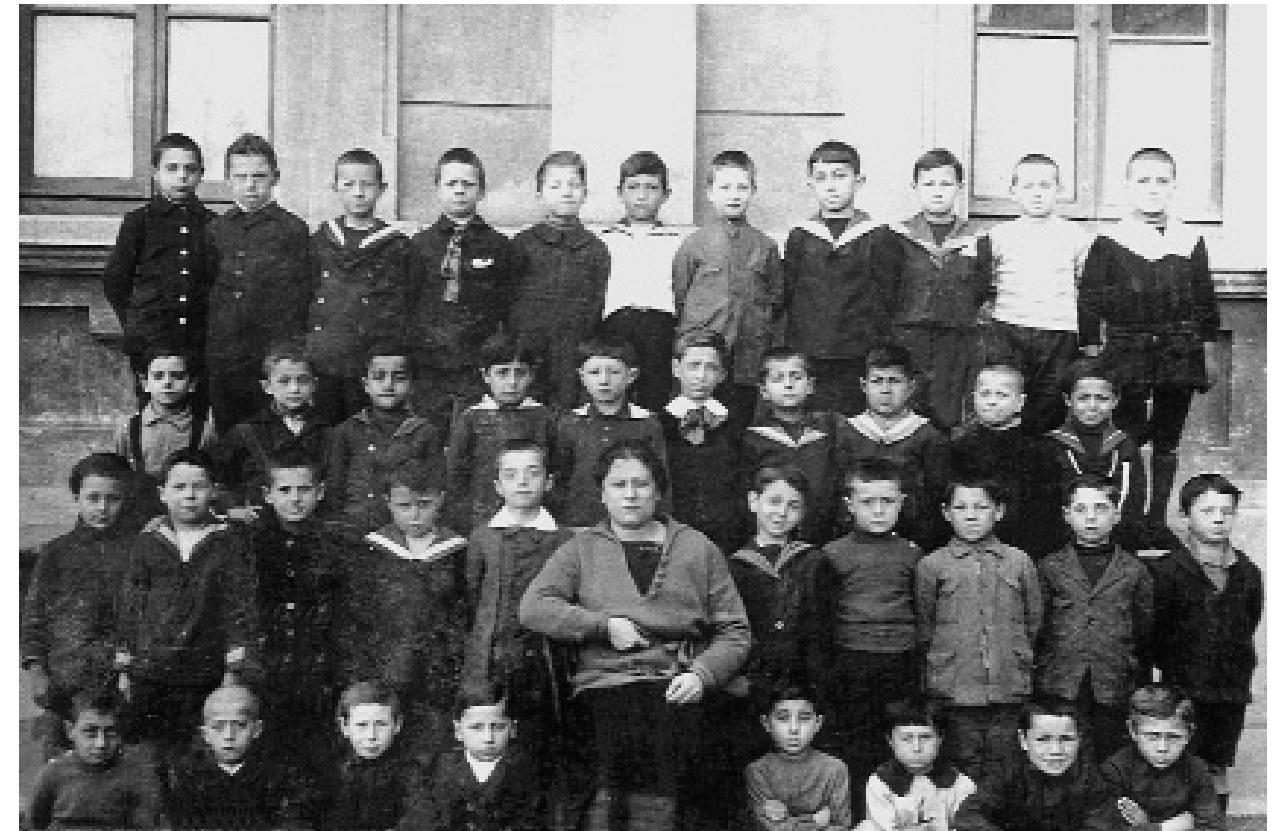
They settled next to the Martesana canal, in a popular neighborhood. Every morning, Carleto would fetch milk from a farm two kilometers away. Come rain, sunshine, or snow, he would go on foot as there was no other means of transport, and anyway there was no money. Olímpia sewed

at home for a clothing workshop. One memory that accompanied their son throughout his life was the rhythmic sound of his mother's sewing machine when he went to bed. Olímpia would still be active late into the night.

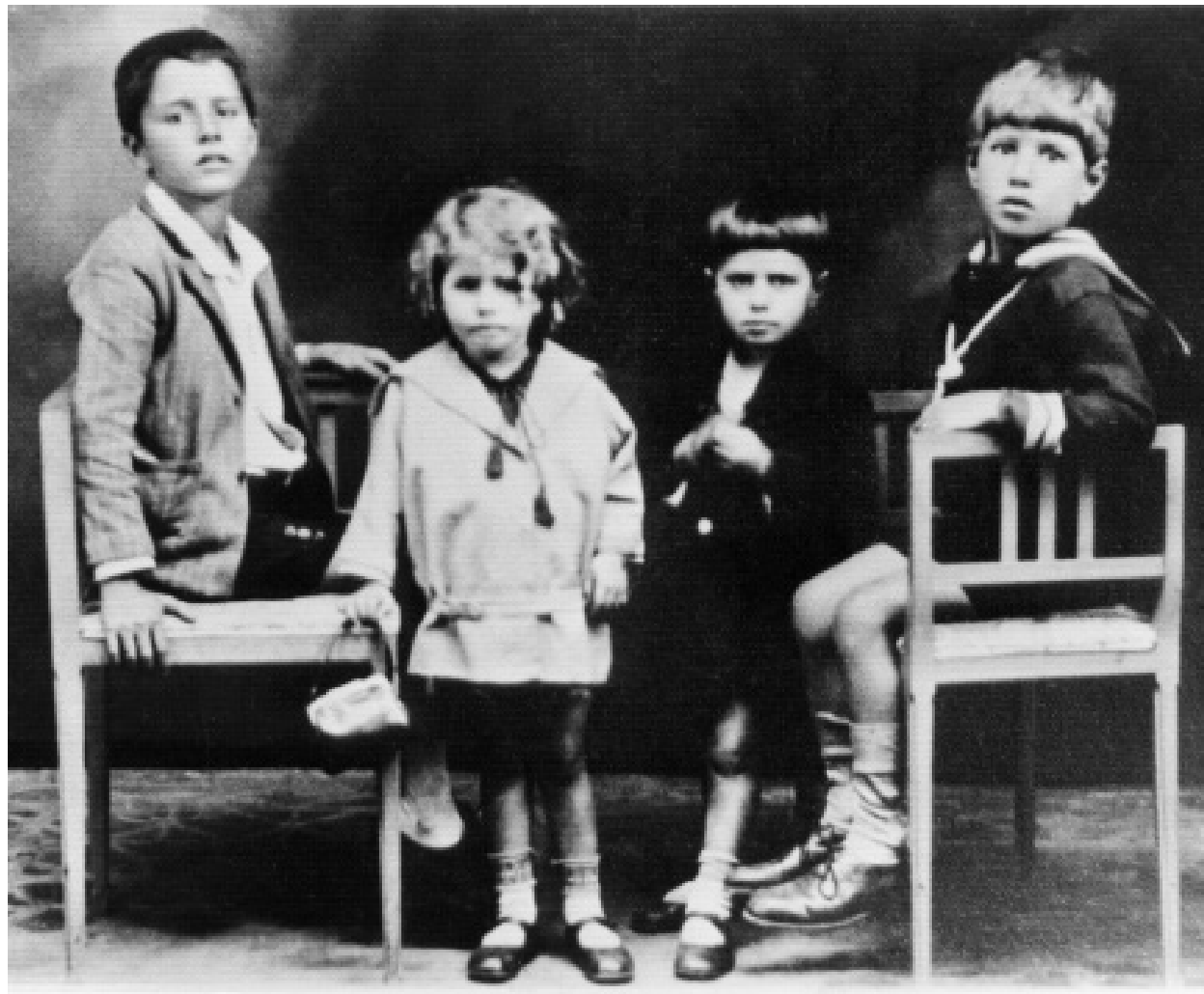
In May 1920, Giordano was born. In order to improve his income, Emílio worked double shifts, working at night and seeing very little of the children. Olímpia energetically took care of everything. On Sunday, they would put on their best clothes—Emílio liked to dress well—and would visit her parents, who lived close by. Sometimes they would watch a movie, especially Chaplin films.

These were turbulent years, especially in Milan. That was where Mussolini founded his first fascist group, which soon took a stand against the Communists. Street fights were common between Black Shirts and strikers. Emílio didn't want anything to do with politics and was concerned about the lack of security.

At the end of 1923, he made a decision he had long thought about and discussed with his wife. Despite the offer of a high salary and an invitation from Pirelli to work in Singapore, he refused. Brazil was his target. Shortly before Christmas, leaving Carleto at a school, Emílio, Olímpia (pregnant once again), and Giordano embarked to Brazil. They were no longer immigrants arriving without a dime in their pockets. The same way his father had saved up to return to Italy, Emílio made a nest egg with his mind set on Brazil.



Carleto (lower corner, wearing a white coat with dark lapels) at school, Italy, 1920s



Previous page: From left to right, Giordano, Julieta, Romeu, and Álvares, Emílio and Olímpia's children

SETBACKS IN SÃO PAULO

Emílio and Olímpia intended to stay in the São Paulo capital city, which offered the best opportunities. The couple had two hundred contos de réis, a fair amount for the time. They went to live in a comfortable house, at Rua da Mooca, an Italian and Spanish district. A countryman gave Emílio a job as a mechanic and driver at the Garage Nacional.

On April 11, 1924, Álvares was born, named in honor of Pedro Álvares Cabral, the discoverer of Brazil. Emílio didn't have the makings of an employee. He dreamed of his own business, it was time to take a risk; he had the capital. He had Policarpo's excitement in his blood, the same that led him to be an adventurer in Goiás. He found premises on the Consolação street, almost on the corner with the Paulista avenue. It was a privileged location, close to the large mansions of coffee barons.

Astutely, he realized that many people arrived at what would normally be closing time and thought of a novelty; nighttime service. Now, through most of the week he would spend the night working. After all, how often hadn't

he worked overtime at Brown-Boveri? At twenty-eight years of age he was physically fit. Any time a client would arrive, he or she would find Emílio or another mechanic. Absolute pioneering. News spread quickly amongst the drivers and his shop prospered, with high-end clientele.

However, the Romis had already realized that they had exchanged one unstable situation for another. President Artur Bernardes administration was in a constant state of siege, with censorship and repression, facing risings and regional conflicts. With the high price of coffee, which dominated Brazilian economy, everything was getting more expensive and the high prices caused discontent amongst São Paulo workers.

On July 5, 1924, *Tenentista* [literally Lieutenantist, a group of Brazilian Army officers] rebels took the city [they were extremely dissatisfied with the current regime]. The governor fled and *Legalista* [those in favor of the government] forces reacted. São Paulo turned into chaos, with bombings, fires, and buildings crumbling. Dominated by rebels, Mooca district became



Previous page: Standing, from left to right, Francisca Romi Lardera, Giovanni Lardera, Olímpia and Emílio; sitting, Maria Romi Lardera and Gino Lardera, 1910s

Americana, 1920s

isolated. During those days, the workshop was commandeered by government troops, and Emílio was obliged to stay at home for another reason: Olímpia was bedridden with intoxication. It was very difficult to find a doctor or get to a hospital.

When the revolution was over, and Emílio returned to the workshop, it had been depleted and was empty. With his heart in his hand, Emílio saw that everything had been pillaged; all the tools and even the cars waiting to be fixed were gone. It was a very depressing moment, without equity or capital and now with another son.

He accepted a well-paid job at the Alfa-Romeo agency. In 1925, backed up by the ever economical Olímpia, he managed to raise enough capital for another shop, the Garage Universal, this time at Rua Ipiranga, in the downtown area. He had a partner, Tonho, who he had met at Alfa-Romeo.



Another setback: Tonho fell in love with a neighborhood woman and fled to Rio de Janeiro taking all the cash they had in the till. Emílio didn't give up and held on to Universal for some time. Then, in 1926, he sold the shop, went home and told his wife:

"Pia, I'm going to take a trip through the interior, and look for a place for us to settle. We cannot live like this, with these unwarranted surprises!"

One, two, three, four days went by with no news. Olímpia, alone with the boys, without anyone to fall back on and almost unable to speak the language, waited in anguish. But Emílio returned.

"There you go, I have found a place for us! Let's start a new life!"

He found a job at a Chevrolet dealership, Delbem & Horschutz, in Americana, 130 kilometers from São Paulo.

THE ROMIS SETTLE IN

Santa Bárbara d'Oeste's history dates back to 1737, when *sesmarias* [allotments] were granted to some proprietors. In 1810, a road was opened between what is now Piracicaba and Campinas. In 1817, Dona Margarida da Graça Martins settled on one of those allotments and established a sugarcane farm. She also donated land to the Curia Paulistana to build a chapel in honor of Santa Bárbara [Saint Barbara], to whom she was devoted. In 1839, the village of Santa Bárbara dos Toledos [last name of an important family in the region] transformed it into a permanently ministered chapel. In 1869, the village, which up to then had belonged to Piracicaba, was emancipated.

With the victory of the Northerners in the American Civil War, the southern us economy was destroyed. Then, optimistic rumors about Brazil began, spread by Dom Pedro II [second and last Emperor of Brazil] emissaries. With its rich red earth and rolling fields and hills resembling Alabama, Santa Bárbara was chosen by new immigrants who began to arrive during the second half of the 1860s.

The Americans changed everything by bringing their agricultural implements—plows, toothed plows, trenchers, seeders, spinner boxes, and harvesters. These were great novelties in a country as yet primitive in terms of equipment and technology. Natives learnt from newcomers, so much so that

in the future they would win important prizes in agricultural fairs, bringing great pride to Santa Bárbara. The Americans also brought teachers from the us and opened their schools to Brazilians. Their doctors introduced notions of hygiene. Other innovations were the kerosene lamp, more agile carts, silk weaving, and watermelon, pecan, and dry-land rice farming, in addition to introducing new varieties of corn.

The lifestyle of these immigrants was very similar to what they had in the USA, and for many years they maintained their language and traditions. The train station was inaugurated in 1875, close to where the Americans gathered, far from the center of the village of Santa Bárbara. Houses multiplied around the station and a neighborhood was formed, Vila dos Americanos, later to become Americana. In 1924, it became a municipality.

When Emílio settled in Americana, the city already had another large colony, the Italians. At the Chevrolet dealership, he was the boss of the workshop, which however, never had more than three employees. Emílio, who was curious and restless, hated being at the office—he wanted to disassemble engines, get his hands dirty with grease, and solve mechanical problems. He worked even on holidays, when he was alone. The shop only closed on Sunday afternoons.

In 1926, Emílio's parents returned from Italy, with sons

Joaquim and Guerino, and settled in the Pinheiros district, in the São Paulo state capital, where Policarpo worked as a shoemaker, fixed furniture, and made domestic utensils. The following year, on September 11, Carlos “Carleto” Chiti arrived, who would become Emílio's right-hand man. It was to become one of those rare unions, a visceral connection.

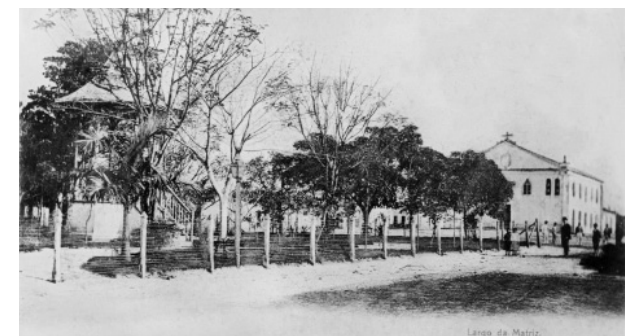
He came together with Emílio's sister, Adélia, and her husband and son, on the steamship *Nazario Sauro*. Emílio went to meet them in Santos, but Olímpia stayed in Americana as she was close to giving birth. They all passed through the Immigrants Hostel in São Paulo. On the fifteenth, they took the train to Americana. Upon arriving home, Carlos almost did not recognize his mother, who was swollen by the pregnancy. It was traumatic. A little later, that same evening, twins Romeu and Julieta were born.

Carleto started to work, first with an Italian tailor, and then in the famous Carioba textile industry, making two thousand réis per day. He would wake up at 5 A.M. and go to work on foot. A year later, Emílio and Olímpia felt it would be best for him to continue with his studies, and the solution was the seminary in Campinas.

In 1928, Policarpo and Regina came to live in Americana. Despite his ailing health, Policarpo still did a little of everything.

Vila Americana railway station, 1912

Further below: Largo da Matriz square, Santa Bárbara, 1909



Vila Americana, early 20th century

Facing page: Emilio, 1920s



Regina went back to midwifery, for which she didn't charge. She was always active, happy, and talkative. She helped teach her grandchildren and neighborhood kids how to read and write. She spoke Portuguese well but mixed in Italian words forming a new and funny language, which later led the kids to heated discussions with their Brazilian teachers, causing curious controversies. Zê or zeta? What was the right name for the letter?

Carleto realized he did not have a religious calling and, in 1929, when he was fifteen, he was sent back to Americana. There were no reprimands, because Emílio was already thinking of other things: at thirty-three, he was about to change his life again.

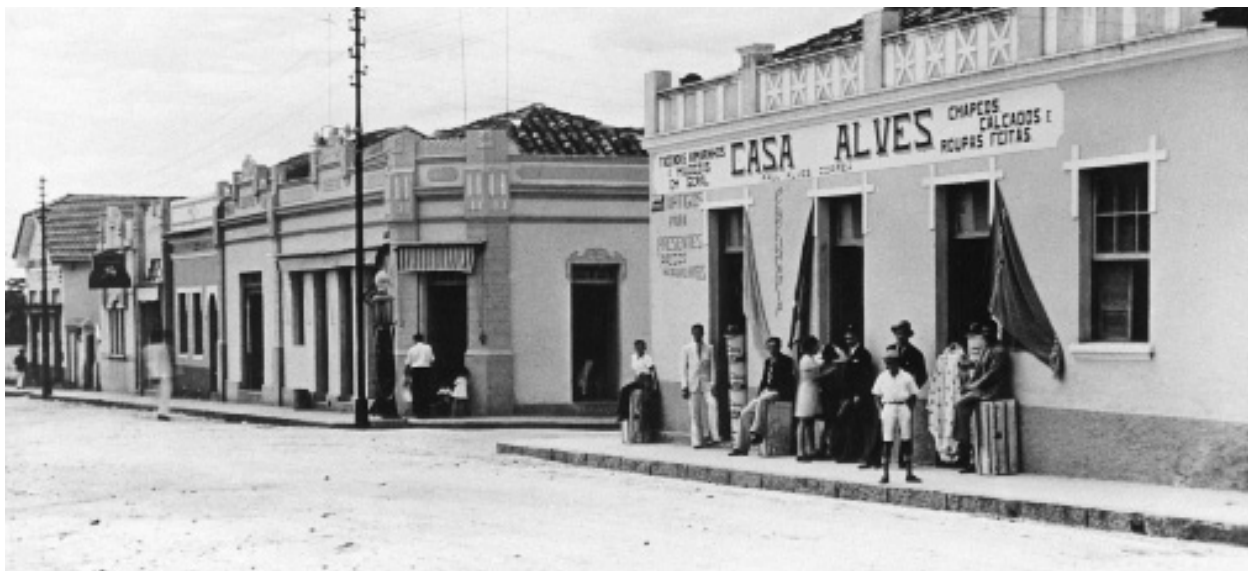
The world crisis that had started that year affected everyone. The Americana Chevrolet dealership had to cut back on personnel and costs. When he was informed that his wage would be cut from six hundred to five hundred thousand réis, Emílio realized that he would be a burden on the shop and asked to be released. He really wasn't the type of man to have a boss, and now circumstances led him to speed up a project he already had in mind for quite some time.

He had noticed that many of the clients came from Capivari or Santa Bárbara, where there were large sugar mills, but no car repair shops. It was time to open another business. Not in Americana – he didn't want to compete with his former boss. His friend Joaquim Pedroso from Santa Bárbara convinced him to set up his shop there.





DECISIVE YEARS



Pages 36 and 37: Garage Santa Bárbara. In the cars, employees Antônio Viana and Salvador Puerta Casas. Between the cars, Carlos, and at the door, Emílio, 1933



Here and previous page: Santa Bárbara, 1930s

In 1929, Santa Bárbara had nine thousand inhabitants, with only three thousand within the urban area. It had wide roads with no sewage system or piped water. Sugar, alcohol, and sugarcane rum dominated the economy, and organized industrial complexes—Cillo, Furlan, Azanha, Santa Bárbara—had substituted dozens of artisanal mills. During the 1920s, other incipient industries sprang up, especially textile. Two or three shops manufactured or fixed plows, and that was it.

For sixty thousand réis per month, Emílio rented a zinc shed on Rua General Osório, 510. It was a ten-by-twenty-meter old stable, with a single wall (the façade). The pillars and trusses were made of wood and it had a dirt floor. A

friend lent him two contos de réis, to be paid back in two years, in order to buy a modest set of tools.

On September 3, 1929, the Oficina Emílio Romi workshop was established. When it rained, the floor turned to mud. Carleto was the only helper:

At first there was a lack of confidence. The city was small, and an oligarchy stated who could stay or not. But clients began to appear, some of which already knew Emílio from Americana. In addition to repairs, he did his PR work visiting companies and nourishing friendships. Little by little, his set of tools multiplied and the workshop grew. Following that, he started to sell auto parts, lubricants, and tires. Two more

helpers were hired. The Americans brought their gear to be fixed and the ever curious Emílio analyzed the agricultural equipment originally from the us, part by part.

Every day, he and Carleto would come and go to and from Santa Bárbara in a 1926 Chevrolet along dirt roads full of holes, and crossing wooden bridges. They woke up early, spent the day at the shop to come home at night with no set time. During the dry season, there was dust. During the rainy season, they would take an hour to cover a distance that today takes five minutes. Olímpia always covering the rear, taking care of the house and the other children, and managing their cash. Not a single cent was

spent without her approval. She would sew, wash, iron, make bread, pasta, and sauces.

At lunchtime during the week there would be rice, beans, and meat. At night, chicken soup or minestrone. On Sundays, if there wasn't too much work at the shop, the entire family would get together for a lunch of pasta, chicken, and polenta. Olímpia was a fully fledged confectioner, and would take full advantage of the fruit growing in the garden—guava, papaya, pumpkin, orange, and banana. There was no time for fun. Once in a while, they would get dressed up and go to a movie.

In 1930, in addition to Emílio and Carleto, there were four other employees at the shop—Salvador Puerta Casas, Ranulpho



*Interior of the Garage Santa Bárbara.
Behind the balcony, Vicente Pizano,
Emílio, and Carlos. In front, from
left to right, Enzo Pizano, Giordano,
Romeu, Renato Pizano, and mechan-
ics Edmundo Nielsen, Salvador Puerta
Casas, and Antônio Viana*

*Romi residence on
Rua General Osório, 1930s*



Camargo, Constantino Furlan, and Antônio Viana. Carleto divided his time between mechanics and administration, organizing the financial side. On Monday, Emílio would take the train to go and buy supplies in São Paulo. On these days, Constantino would fetch Carleto, Olímpia, and Giordano in Americana, in Emílio's Chevrolet, and she would look after the office.

Soon their facilities no longer sufficed, especially in light of the fact that Emílio was also selling used cars. It no longer made sense to live in Americana, and they decided to move to Santa Bárbara. They rented a house on Quinze de Novembro street, in front of the only bakery.

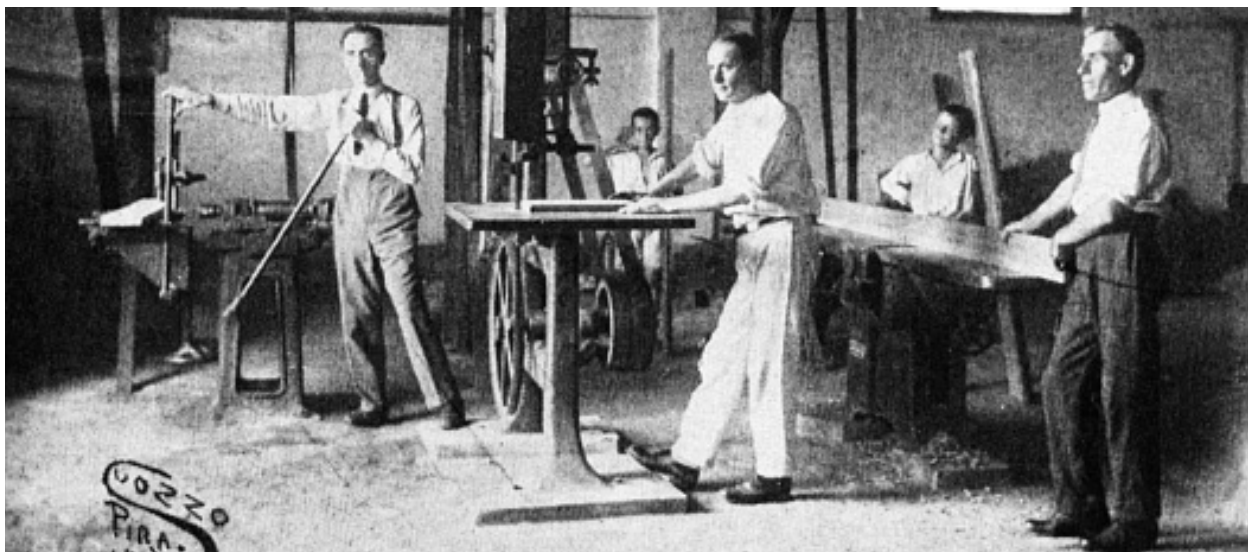
They sold the house in Americana, which had been purchased under Olympia's tight administration, and invested the cash in the company. For 17,500 contos (down payment: a 1930 Chevrolet truck), they bought the property

on Rua Santa Bárbara from Luiz Furlan. The name of the shop was then changed to Garage Santa Bárbara.

The 1930s were fundamental, highlighted by both moments of euphoria and lows. Policarpo died in 1931, at sixty-four or sixty-five. Garage Santa Bárbara grew, occupying the surrounding lots, and then installed a gasoline pump, the second in the city. In 1932, the Constitutionalist Revolution arose and many men from Santa Bárbara enlisted. The forays went on for months, affecting everyday life, especially the supply of imported gasoline which was now exclusively destined for the war effort.

"The pump is empty. Yet another day without delivery, nobody knows when things will go back to normal."

This made Emílio anticipate the Proálcool program by more than four decades [the Programa Nacional do Álcool—Proálcool, which translates as National Alcohol



Previous page: The woodshop. From left to right, Vicente Pizano, Enzo Pizano, Emilio, Giordano, and Materazzo, 1930s

*Agricultural machinery production area, with the French lathe that helped make the table plane, 1930s
Further below: The first foundry.
From left to right, Emilio, Julieta, and Stedefeldt, 1934*

Program, was launched in 1975, by the Brazilian government, aiming at stimulating the manufacture and use of ethanol-fueled cars]. At the Usina Santa Bárbara, an engineer had been testing a mix of 95 percent ethanol with gasoline and lubricant. Emílio supplied the means to speed up the research, and the result was baptized *autolina*. It was sold in five- and ten-liter cans. Engine tuning was simple, carried out at the Garage Santa Bárbara itself. There were problems though—limited production, difficult distribution, and consumer lack of confidence, wondering how things would be when gasoline supply went back to normal. *Autolina* was eventually set aside, but it was the available fuel until the Constitutionalist defeat.

After the revolution, the government decided to auction off a lot of scrap trucks, many of which were combat veterans. Emílio won the auction and brought them to Santa Bárbara.

Cannibalizing the worst, he refurbished the others and sold them at a profit. Several were sold in an unprecedented way: payment was made in installments, according to the productivity of the truck.

In 1932, the first parallel lathe measuring 1.5 meters between centers was bought.

Great businesses are frequently born out of a casual observation or brief conversation between friends. An entrepreneur is a person who manages to capture the idea in the air, project it, idealize it, and transform it. During a conversation with Emílio, an American suggested:

“You make almost all of the parts for the plow, and you have a well-equipped shop. Why don’t you manufacture complete plows?”

“What for? The Americans here import them from the United States.”

“Yes, but they would have to buy them from the Northerners, who are regarded as enemies.”

“But the city already has people manufacturing plows.”

“But they don’t manufacture seeders, spinner boxes, or tine tillers. Think about it.”

Emílio mulled over the idea, studying, taking things apart, and designing equipment. There was potential, and friends and farmers encouraged him.

In 1933, he assembled a woodwork shop further down Duque de Caxias street, where he made plow handles out of Brazilian hardwood such as *peroba*, *ipê*, and *ca-breúva*. After that came the joinery shop, which produced crates and furniture. Then, the metal workshop, which not only manufactured parts for the plows, but also gates and fences. Following that, the artisanal forge, using the forge-welding method.





*Previous page:
Interior of the foundry, 1934*

In this process, two or more pieces of metal are placed in the furnace at thirteen hundred degrees, and then parts are attached by hammering them together. The work is done by two people: one holds the iron over an anvil and hammers it with a hammer, while the other hits it with a mallet until the parts are fused. The bellows, fan, anvil, hammers, mallet, cutting scissors were all manufactured in the shop.

The first implements basically followed the original American design, with improvements, because Emílio always found a way to make them better. He began to organize the work for a production line, saying:

"I think of the day when we will have an assembly line that will unload everything ready out there in front."

It was fundamental to also have a foundry. In 1934, the German Stedefeldt arrived, who designed and installed the first furnace in a corner house on the General Câmara with Duque de Caxias. After that, Stedefeldt worked with Achilles Paes on molding, smelting, and pouring, and also prepared the sand. The foundry was inaugurated on June 29 that year. A

forge was also built. They bought used machinery and hired more people, including expert mechanical tuner Alécio Biondi, who would become Emílio's right-hand man for many years.

However, as soon as the building undertakings were finished at a cost of thirty contos, Emílio found himself decapitalized. He therefore sold the building for forty (contos)—and became its first tenant.

This caused perplexity and sarcasm, and many doubted his business skills. What no one knew was that Emílio wasn't even able to raise a mortgage to build and, now, he needed cash to maintain production and set up the facilities. With the foundry, things began to grow. The only item that was bought was the fan because it was impossible to build it from scratch. The rest was all self-built. The first machine tool built by Romi was a planer. Shortly afterwards, the base for the hammer was forged. When lathe work or finishing was required, they used the services of Dedini, in Piracicaba. In addition to Stedefeldt, Paes, and Biondi, carpenters and joiners Alberto Bignotto, Vicente Pizano, and José Deleo also worked in the foundry.

Spinner box and seeder

Facing page: Máquinas Agrícolas
Romi advertisement, 1930s



THE CARAVANS

“The Romi caravan is coming to town!”

For many years back then, this was a cry that would echo through the towns of the interior. The caravan was welcomed with great expectation and would gather people together in the main square or on some large vacant lot.

The caravans were Carleto’s idea, and were an unprecedented and absolutely modern initiative that emerged from the need to teach people how to work with the equipment. Sales sometimes didn’t come to fruition because workers claimed they didn’t know how to use the products. And so, one day, Emílio and Carleto took the large 1930 Chevrolet truck, removed the hamper protections and bolted down the machinery, plows, weeders, seeders, and whatever else would fit, and hit the road showing everyone what they were for.

At first, the caravan was only one truck. Then it became two, three, following product diversification. They would

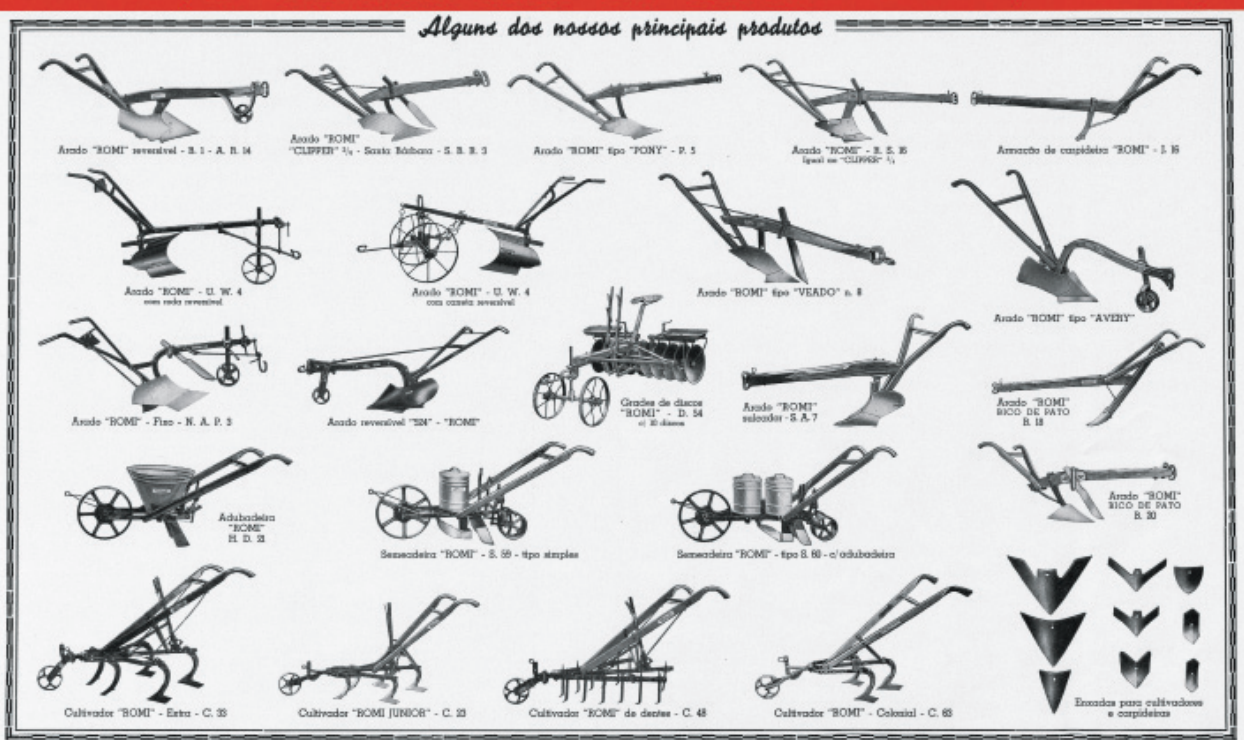
usually unload and install themselves in the same areas reserved for circuses and amusement fairs. A theoretical lesson would show how the machines worked and how to use them. Then, local farmhands, who were only used to working with hand tools, would touch the plows, which in their eyes worked miracles. Depending on the place, hundreds of demonstrations were carried out per day. Emílio and Carleto frequently joined the caravans, and later on, Giordano and Álvares too.

An emissary would go on ahead through the interior of the state, programming the route. Warehouses and hardware stores would help with the publicity. They would talk to mayors, farmers, and colonists. And the news would spread through the towns and fields. Everyone would come to see.

Later on, the emissaries started to take explanatory leaflets, with illustrations of each piece of equipment. They made ample

MÁQUINAS AGRÍCOLAS “ROMI LIMITADA”

A MAIOR FÁBRICA DE MÁQUINAS AGRÍCOLAS DO BRASIL
Rua Sta. Bárbara, 632 - SANTA BÁRBARA PAULISTA - C. P. - Est. de S. Paulo - Caixa Postal, “H” - Telefone, 27





Romi products at a fair, 1940s

*Grocery store with Romi products.
Rio Grande do Sul, 1930s*



use of the rocks along the side of the road and farm gates to write ROMI in large letters as an efficient form of advertising.

They didn't only work the state of São Paulo. They would reach places in the south of Minas Gerais and in the north of Paraná, such as Londrina, which by then was no more than a rustic campsite in the forest. They would often have to wait all day for ox-trains to come and free the trucks from the mud.

It was necessary to sell quickly, because merchandise could not be allowed to pile up. This was a new learning curve, and the caravans were equally useful for Brazilian agriculture, which was opening up towards mechanization and the future. Leaflets were frequently scattered by planes over towns. In order to cater for the large colonies, they were also written in Italian, Polish, German, and Japanese. (However, when war was declared against the Axis, they were only published in Portuguese.)

Advertising and marketing set Romi aside from other local industries, which were restricted to their regional circuits. This made such an impression that, fifteen years after the manufacture of agricultural equipment had come to an end, people would still come up, asking:

"Don't you have such and such machine?! But it's written on the stone close to my house!"

Through newspaper and radio publicity, the company and Santa Bárbara became known nationally, and the city developed

quickly. At one point, demand was so great that machine finishing was carried out on the trucks, on their way to the train.

It was necessary to find a company in São Paulo to join up with Romi, because despite Emilio or Carleto's constant trips to São Paulo, demand now required full-time representation there. Thus, in 1935, the company formed an association with Oscar Maspes. Meanwhile, Carlos Chiti was now dedicating himself exclusively to marketing and sales. Foster and Bromberg in São Paulo and Hasenclever in Rio, were companies that represented German manufacturers (who were leaders in the tools and machinery market), but now also took on board Romi products. Later on, retailers would also receive large posters containing images and specifications of the entire line of machinery—plows, furrowers, tillers, hoes for weeders and tillers. Soon it was clear that each colony had a preference for a certain type of machine. In the state of São Paulo, where the influence was more American, people would want Clipper, Pony, or Planet plows. On the other hand, Germans in Rio Grande do Sul preferred equipment closer to that of Rud Sack. Thus, the wide variety of machines offered by Romi.

Also in 1935, the company launched the first seeder totally manufactured in Brazil. That same year, an Austrian engineer, who worked at Fredotti, brought an electric welding machine and made demonstrations. This was the end of the complicated forge-welding process: welding represented simplification, time saving, and the release of employees for



*Façade of the Cine Santa
Rosa movie theater*

other tasks. It was cutting-edge technology arriving; doors were opening up to the modern world.

Plows, seeders, and spinner boxes required their own training courses—the country needed schools to teach how to use this equipment. Thus, in August 1937, the first school for plowers and tractor drivers was created in Santa Bárbara. Emílio was the mechanical instructor.

With Garage Santa Bárbara's expansion, it crossed the General Osório street and, in 1938, turned into Máquinas Agrícolas Romi Ltda., with a stock capital of three hundred contos. That year production doubled and in 1939 it tripled. From the initial facilities on a little over two hundred square meters, it was now approaching two thousand square meters, with twelve hundred square meters in built area. At that point, the Santa Bárbara, Duque de Caxias, and General Osório streets were fundamentally marked by Romi.



*Carnival in
Santa Bárbara, 1930s*

Life was typical of small towns. The children loved the Monday features at Cine Santa Rosa, which had been inaugurated in 1939. Parents, on the other hand, preferred Sunday sessions, with westerns, musicals, and romantic dramas.

There were folk parties, carnivals, and fairs, sometimes some music in the bandstand. Bands from neighboring towns would bring the *cateretê*, *congada*, and *umbigada* [folkloric Brazilian dances]. Not to mention the traditional *footing*, with men standing on the curb and women walking up and down, exchanging glances, flirting, and setting up dates.

In 1939, Romi had 120 employees and monthly revenue of 130 contos. Emílio's life, however, seem to be marked by war. The war started in Europe, and international trade became considerably complicated. Steel was already in short supply and it seemed that Romi would have to come to a halt.

Emilio worked hard, paying little attention to himself. He never took extended holidays, only a few days here and there. One day he went for a breather in Santos and, watching the movement on the docks, he noticed a ship being scrapped. There were piles of scrap—sheet steel, girders, tracks. He thought to himself: “If I get these sheets, I can cut them into strips and transform them into iron laminate. That’s all I need for the plows!”

They invested 250 contos to assemble a laminator, which was a difficult and lengthy process. They achieved something with the machine, and part of the production was sold to other companies, however profits were meager.

Worse still: the laminator cylinders were unable to take the strain and would break, and the product achieved was not always up to the necessary quality. Emilio was also not the only one to process scrap — there was competition. Sales dropped off, scrap became more expensive, and the black market appeared.

Year 1940 was over. The country was experiencing the dictatorship of the New State. With government incentives, national industry managed some growth from 1933 to 1939, but the country continued to be economically dependent, and did not produce capital goods.

The government rationed oil byproducts. The Romi laminator furnace consumed oil, and the company was now only supplied with five metric tons of fuel per month, compared to the forty metric tons it received previously. As such, the furnace only worked one or two days a week. The national coke also lay in

the black market. Romi’s production came to a standstill.

Further discouragement: the lamination system was destroyed by a fire. Then came almost insurmountable difficulties. Debts amounted to one thousand contos, expenses increased, prices weren’t competitive. Part of the agricultural equipment stock was sold at a loss, for three hundred contos. Fifty out of the 120 employees were laid off and wages of others, reduced.

Emilio felt really bad about reducing wages, as he knew what that meant for the families. He managed to reduce expenses by thirty contos per month. Casa Foster extended him a loan. Debts to the banks were liquidated little by little.

Much later Carlos Chiti explained that phenomenal experience was gained during the crisis, and greater clarity and precision of ideas, with greater effective results from the work.

Nonetheless, the 1940 balance sheet showed a loss of two hundred contos.

On January 31, 1941, the family suffered the loss of Emilio’s mother: Regina Seppia passed away at sixty-six years of age, ten years after the death of Policarpo. At times like these, Emilio would become quiet, mulling things over and shutting himself out from the world. Eventually, little by little, he would come back to the foray, analyzing problems and seeking solutions. In order to pay the loans, all that was needed was the available raw material, experience, and equipment to manufacture something the market was greatly in need of. But what?

The question plagued them for weeks.

Regina Seppia Romi’s passport, 1939



A POWERHOUSE IS BORN

Carlos Chiti broke the silence, and his words fell like lightning bolt. The family thought they had misheard. Chiti said it again.

“Let’s manufacture lathes!”

He wasn’t one to play games at times like these, but the idea seemed to be out of context. They were in a crisis, no cash, and production had been halted. How could they manufacture lathes if they had neither the technology nor the tools? They would have to completely restructure.

However, the proposal hadn’t just come out of thin air. Chiti traveled a lot and had thoroughly probed the market. Brazil already had a manufacturing activity that demanded mechanical parts and components. With the war, imports were extremely difficult. Those who already had lathes, had orders up to their necks, and there was a lack of this essential equipment.

What Chiti said made sense. Romeu, Álvares, and Giordano, whose ages ranged from thirteen to twenty, were excited with the idea. The conversation continued

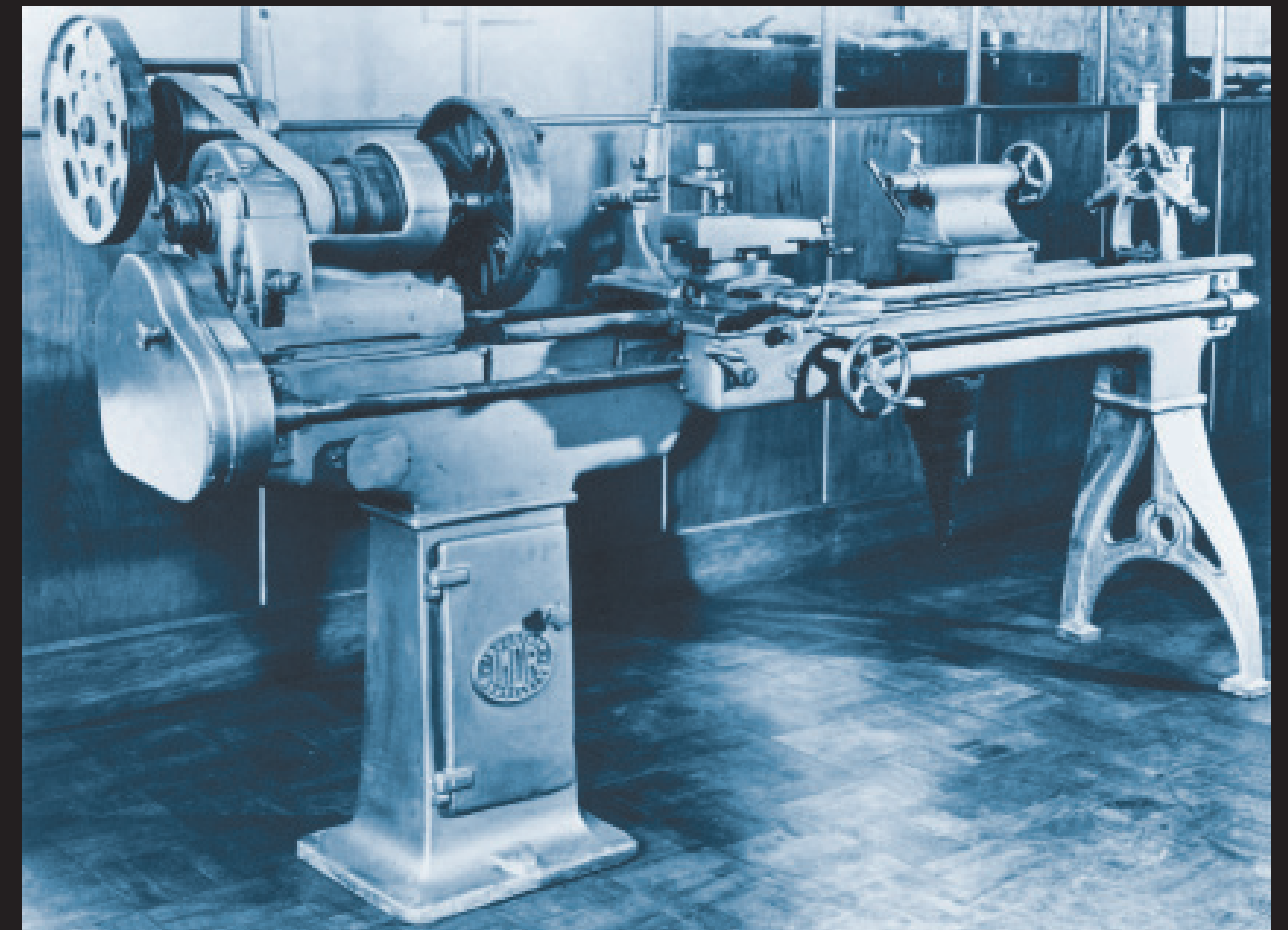
and the atmosphere changed. The hopelessness that had existed for months dissolved.

Lathes? Why not? Nobody had the faintest idea where to start. How? They would have to find out!

The next question was where to get the equipment to manufacture the components. Romi didn’t have a planer machine lathe’s beds. There was no way to cut the gears. They didn’t have a reaming machine, a radial drill or a grinding machine. Measurement and control were inexistent.

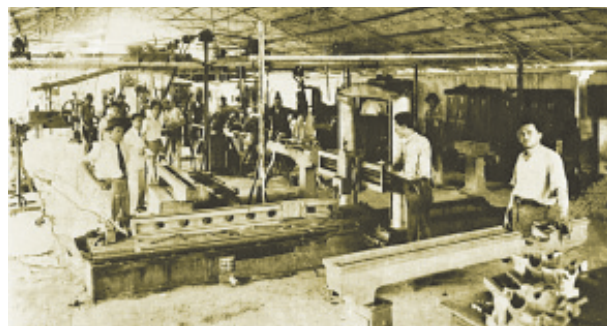
It was fundamental to get to know the machine piece by piece and the structure of a lathe in its minimum details. That night, almost nobody slept. Early in the morning, they were all at the plant scouring the machinery. They had six lathes of their own, from various sources. They chose to dissect their very first, a 1932 model measuring 1.5 meters between centers. It was a German Eriksen model. They took it completely apart, from the block to the smallest screw. The parts were laid out in order on the floor and examined in detail.

*TP Lathe, the first
manufactured by Romi, 1941*



Lathes sold to the Carlos Hoepke company in Santa Catarina, 1940s

Further below: Planer manufactured by Romi to make lathe bars. To the left of the photograph, Emilio and behind him, Carlos, Álvares, and Giordano (wearing a hat). To the right of the photograph, in the foreground, Alcécio Biondi; behind him, João Babão, 1940



All of Romi's activities were now concentrated on this investigation. They put together a project, estimated what was necessary to produce the equipment—which parts they would buy, which they would manufacture, and how to organize the assembly line. There were ideas, suggestions, and drafts, and plenty of work, all around the clock. Enthusiasm grew, and lathe operators gave them suggestions and hints. The Eriksen was modified and the improved Romi began to emerge.

They got company letterhead paper, attached photographs of lathes, added the features, and sent it to the retailers. They stated that they were lathe manufacturers, specifying product details, and requested those interested to make contact for further details. The lathe didn't even exist, and Romi was already trying to sell it. It was the anxiety and, more importantly, the confidence they had in themselves.

Meanwhile, they studied the equipment that was needed to manufacture the machines. One of those responsible for lamination, the old Italian engineer Oneto, master metal worker and mechanic, threw a damper on the whole thing:

"You need a large planer, and nobody makes them in this country!"

"They can be made partially out of wood," shot back Emilio.

"Wood? It won't take the load."

"When I worked at Brown-Boveri, I saw wooden planers up to twenty meters, reinforced with iron, and they held up very well."

"Yes, but they had the means to make them there!"

Another version of this story states that it was the Austrian engineer Francisco Wallauschek who doubted it was possible to manufacture the planer. But that the idea was challenged, it was, and there was nothing better to motivate Emilio.

There were very few planers in Brazil, and their owners were extremely jealous of them. Being extremely tactful, the Romis managed to take a look at a few of them and, upon leaving those companies, they would frantically take down notes. Thus, the planer was designed and the parts were forged, using all the leftovers from the laminator. Instead of prismatic, the columns were cylindrical so that they could be cast and machined at Romi itself, because they lacked the resources to buy them. The support spheres for the tools were also machined there, on the modest planer. And only the prismatic travel crossbeam was machined elsewhere, at the shop of their friend Túlio Baccaglioni. The table connection was accomplished using a used elevator cable. The transmission came from a truck, and an electric motor drove the table and reversed the movement. Already in 1940, it began to work.

By adapting, improvising, and inventing, they created the tools, all of them pumping adrenaline, working nonstop on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. With only a few final touches left to be done, on April 10, 1941, a Holy Thursday, tension was peaking.

The right thing would have been champagne, but there was no cash, so somebody fetched some beer.

At about 4 P.M., everyone got together and admired the first lathe. Would it work? Expectation. The lathe operator shook nervously but proudly. Total silence, hundreds of people were waiting.

The lathe operator fired up the machine and it started to work. Everyone waited, containing their anxiety. The lathe continued to work and rumble. There was laughter and hugs and beer all round.

“This is number one!”

Conscientious, smart, and quick on the draw, Chiti murmured to Emílio:

“One?... Who is going to want to buy the first one, being almost experimental?”

No, there would be no number one. They needed to start with an elevated number, something impressive. Twenty? Thirty? Fifty?

Motivated, Chiti suggested 101. A nice, convincing number.

Thus, the first Romi lathe would be the 101. And the 101 would be the first of the TP *parallel lathe* series. A 1.5-m between centers TP-5. A name was also necessary. Something that sounded good, easy and uncompromising. They didn't know yet whether the company would prosper in the field and, therefore, they were apprehensive about giving the product the Romi name—if the lathe were to fail, the name would be depreciated. Chiti then suggested a simple formula: inverting the family name. Thus, Imor was born, which was also an acronym for Indústria de Máquinas Operatrizes Romi, meaning Romi Machine Tools (which, however, never became the company name).

Now the practical issues: how to organize scale production? How to put together a sales structure? There was no time, there was no assembly line. The thing to do was work, produce, and solve problems along the way. The lathes began to appear. First one a week, and then two.

It was wartime, and the Deutz distributor in São Paulo was unable to bring products from Germany. So, it sent its manager Albrecht von Sidou to Santa Bárbara. He tested the lathes with Germanic rigor and approved them. Deutz

Romi lamination department, 1940





would become the first Imor distributor, and it seems that the first buyer was from Minas Gerais.

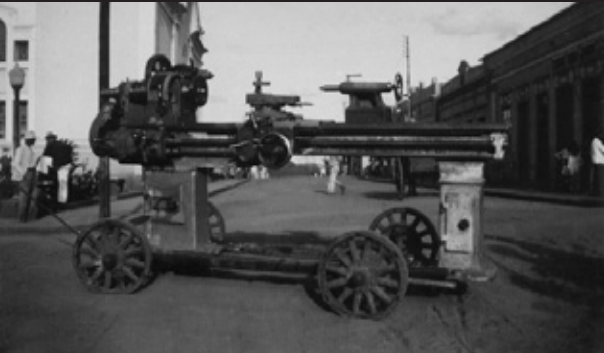
Early on, the children were sent to the plant. On this point Olímpia was rigorous. If anyone claimed to be sick or indisposed, she immediately put a stop to it:

“Cut it out, go and work!”

In 1934, when they had started to manufacture equipment, twenty-year-old Carleto and fourteen-year-old Giordano were already working full time. Giordano, who had already been working since the previous year, went from mechanics to welding, milling, fine tuning, and assembly. He knew so much about foundry work that he made quality-control tools and created a manual containing charts, graphs, coefficients, and methods. When he finished primary school in Santa Bárbara, there was only secondary school in Limeira, which led him to go to school by day and

*Previous page:
Carlos Chiti, early 1950s*

*Lathe crosses the street to
expedition, 1940s*



work at night. Transport, however, was so precarious that he had to quit regular school and was obliged to attend a *madureza* course [supplementary or late-starter education]. In 1940, he was accepted for mechanical engineering at Mackenzie University, in São Paulo, but returned at the beginning of 1941, when he was summoned by his father who needed his help to manufacture the first lathe.

In 1934, ten-year-old Álvares would take breakfast to his father and end up hanging around. He would be given small errands: he was a helper in the storeroom, he knew all the parts, and gained an understanding of measurements. In 1938, with his workbook officially registered, he went to accounting and was in charge of time keeping. At seventeen, he was emancipated in order to become a partner of Máquinas Agrícolas Romi. He was still a boy, but he was always in the banks discussing loans and rediscounts. At nineteen, he took care of the

company's books. One of his teachers was Estevão Faraone, a man who had only one job his entire life, at Romi, and was like a younger brother to Emílio.

Due to the age difference, Romeu took a little longer to enter the company, having previously graduated in engineering from Mackenzie. However, in 1953 he also came to Romi.

“You are starting young because, if you make a mistake now, I still have time to correct it, to help out and fix things,” explained Emílio. “Later on, I won’t be able to do anything.”

It was difficult to find him in the office, he wouldn’t stop there. He would arrive early, sometimes before the workers. With his coat buttoned up and starched collar, he would leap up the staircase. He would hurry from machine to machine, probing, inspecting, and giving guidance.

He was charismatic. Yes, he did have adversaries when he entered politics, but not many enemies were known. If

he had to reprimand anyone, he did so, and rudely. He did not tolerate repetition of errors. When he saw something wrong for the second or third time, he would go ballistic.

“Disgraziato, see what you’ve done!!”

He would then take out his cigarettes and offer one.

“Here. Take one.”

He would say what he had to on the spot. He didn’t hold back.

“I don’t want to be big,” he would repeat. *“I want to be the best.”*

Hence his agitation, obstinacy, perfectionism, and demand upon others and upon himself.

In company decisions, contrary to the patriarchal and concentrating Italian figurine, he would listen, consult, discuss, and seek support, often trying to impose his point of view only through astuteness.

He would pronounce his words slowly and did not bury the *r* of the infinitive form [in Portuguese the infinitive form always ends in *r*], although he sometimes did not pronounce the *s* of plural forms, especially when speaking quickly.

He was communicative, open, and enjoyed life. However, he wasn’t one to laugh at just anything. If someone in need were to come to him, Emílio would stick his hand in his pocket and hand over whatever was in there without looking. He would frequently quote the prayer of Saint Francis:

“For it is in giving that we receive.”

His pastime was to invent things and he liked to please people. Thus, he gave Faraone a paddle boat, which he had made himself. The first time out, the boat capsized and both of them ended up in the water. Julieta, on the bank with Olímpia and friends cried out fearing the worst.

At home, he would join Olímpia singing snippets of opera. Álvares learnt Italian hearing his mother sing. The family had a collection of opera records, such as *Aida*, *Rigoletto*, and *La Traviata*. Emílio would make up his own versions, changing the lyrics.

“La donna è mobile, qual piuma al vento,” sang Olímpia.

And he:

“La donna è mobile, come un’automobile.”

By the end of 1941, Romi had manufactured over forty lathes. Production became continuous working twenty-four hours a day in shifts. In 1942, once the plant was rationalized, they got up to three hundred. The lathes were lifted up in the assembly shed on General Osório street. A trailer pushed by four or five men took them to be painted, finished, and expedited on Santa Bárbara street. Then they were loaded on a truck and taken to the Paulista train or straight to their final destination. They weighed between seven and eight hundred kilograms and were sold for US\$7,000 each.

In 1943, Romi experienced great moments. Emílio turned forty-seven and was honored with a bust. Without counting



Inauguration of Emílio's bust, an honor bestowed by employees, 1943

Below: The announcement of the 1,000th lathe, 1943





the administrative staff, there were already 529 workers, in comparison to 242 a year before and 166 in 1941. Emílio's birthday coincided with the production of lathe #1,000. It was a great party—even though it was actually really 899...

Eucalyptus and zinc sheds had been rapidly assembled to store material, but the company no longer fit in the tight center of Santa Bárbara. They found the ideal location: roughly fifty hectares next to the Paulista station, a first-class location. Although understandings with the owners took time, they were eventually concluded. They began the construction undertakings, the largest the city had seen in many years. (Romi is currently undergoing a similar process.) In six months, the new facilities were ready: three thousand square meters of covered area, with a further nine thousand prepared for patios and warehouses.

The year was 1944. Pioneering times were over. The agricultural machinery factory had turned into a lathe factory (although the old company name was maintained for a long time to come), but the spirit continued the same: always producing on a larger, better, more economic, and more competitive scale.

With the war against the Axis, many companies had fired qualified German employees. Chiti brought several of them to Romi, and thereby initiated, for example, accounting modernization, by implementing cost planning, which was to be a new and essential area.

Romi already operated with more than thirty retailers. It became clear that the Brazilian market was not big enough for production expansion, and so two employees, Humberto Mayrink and Herbert Dresbach, traveled South America selling lathes to Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Chile, Venezuela, and Colombia.

Up to 1944, parts were manufactured according to three-dimensional models, because very few workers knew how to read and write, thereby making it unfeasible to use drawings. That year, Romi installed the first school for workers. Through it and training, mechanical drawings were introduced, thus increasing part precision.

They continued to use their inventiveness. For example, Romi couldn't just go about buying jig borers. Mário Nigra, a worker who had learnt his profession in Europe, solved the problem by turning lathes into borers, which would machine thousands of headstocks for many, many years.

In 1944, almost one thousand people worked at Romi, of which 549 were workers. In São Paulo, Chiti established a company called Premier (which was later incorporated by Romi) to identify and size Brazilian market needs and foster closer contact with the clientele.

As of 1945, with the end of the war, large industries abroad no longer manufactured materials for war and were yet again concentrating on supplying peacetime necessities.

In Brazil, the Vargas dictatorship was over, and the trade balance was experiencing an unprecedented primary surplus, obtained from the sale of raw materials during the conflict. The Dutra administration released imports, and those reserves were exhausted on immediate consumption goods. At the same time, latest-generation machinery was arriving without taxation, competing with the local industry.

Again, a new impasse: to modernize or to stop. Romi production amounted to seventeen hundred lathes/year in 1944, but sales were stagnated. It was necessary to act quickly. Yet again, the war (or the end of it) came to solve the problem.

In 1946, upon reading a specialized American magazine, Chiti saw an ad that caught his attention: in two weeks' time, there was going to be an auction in Patterson, New

Jersey, of an allotment of new tooling machinery, which was part of an enormous US war surplus. Everything for one-tenth of the market price. Chiti showed the ad to Emílio, who immediately became enthusiastic:

"It might be worth going there!"

They had a family meeting and it was unanimous. They were a daring group of people. But what about the cash? The next day, Chiti went to the banks to raise loans. At the same time, he went after import licenses. Chiti left on one day and Giordano on the next. It was almost a three-day trip on a DC-3, including several stops. Once in Patterson, they visited all the overflowing Wright hangars, who made aviation engines. They were overwhelmed by the hundreds of new machines. They chose and bought a dozen. After





*Leaving the plant.
To the right, Emílio, 1940s*

that, with more experience, they visited the large American government warehouses. Giordano chose more machines, until they had bought another fifty or sixty.

Chiti went back, but Giordano stayed on for another eight months, taking courses and internships to become acquainted with the equipment they had purchased. He went to institutions such as the MIT and through almost twenty tooling machinery industries, such as American Tool Works, Norton Grinder, and Sundstrand. With this, he found other warehouses and extremely interesting promotional sales.

“Damn! I think he’s going to spend all our cash!” exclaimed Emílio, who immediately approved the purchases.

More loans and more discussions as to payment periods. Now Romi had two hundred state-of-the-art machines. Teams were sent to the US in search of technology. In Brazil, they secured internships at the Naval Arsenal and at FNM [the Brazilian National Engine Factory], that operated an industrial park using similar tooling machinery. It took two years to install the equipment, train the operators, and make everything work.

In 1946, the Santa Bárbara d’Oeste Metalworkers Union was founded on a piece of land donated by Emílio. (Its headquarters would be inaugurated seven years later.) When they wanted to solve any problem, union leaders would consult Álvares:

“Can we have a meeting after six at Mr. Emílio’s office?”

The father, however, left the resolution of everything up to Álvares himself. Emílio only repeated to his sons:

“Protect the company and protect the company’s owners. With bad commands from the owners, the company will go broke, disappear, and everyone loses.”

Chiti, Giordano, Álvares, and Romeu, living under the same roof, under identical guidance and discipline, understood each other. There was friction, sometimes even altercation, but they remained united. The thing was to work and produce, without selfishness. Emílio gave them freedom and his sons treated him as an equal.

With the passing of the years, Emílio’s initial fearlessness diminished and the founder became more cautious. At one point, Giordano was arguing because he wanted to make an investment and take a risk. Emílio rebuked:

“Listen! Let’s keep our feet on the ground!”

“But, Dad, you have always been so daring! You forged ahead and were successful.”

“Son, when all I had was a hammer and an anvil, I could risk everything, because on the following day I could have another hammer and another anvil. Now we have something extremely big, we can’t act the same way. We need serenity.”

Trips abroad became a necessary routine. In 1947, Giordano went to see the novelties at the International Fair in Chicago. That year, the new NTPN and NTCN lathes



Lanz-Bulldog tractor, 1949

Facing page: A federal economic authority, General Anápio Gomes, at the wheel of a Toro, late 1940s

were launched, many of which continue in operation after so many decades. The Projects and Drawings Department was created, and then Industrial Engineering, Production Control, and Quality Control. They would test experimental models and patents would follow. This prompted Charles E. Somogyi, a renowned expert in international labor organization, to state that if Romi were an American company, it would rank amongst the best sector factories in the USA.

However, the foreign exchange crisis and lack of a policy to safeguard the Brazilian private initiative yet again brought everything to a halt. Romi's production dropped to four or five hundred lathes a year. They also attempted to manufacture weaving machines, but ended up only making about ten of them. Then, Emílio had the idea to produce tractors, which then only amounted to about ten or eleven thousand in Brazil.

"Everything here is done by hand! It's a shame, and we're proud of being an agricultural country!"

Romi was the first factory to manufacture tractors in Brazil. The first tractor was of the Lanz-Bulldog type, very heavy and not very versatile. A lighter, more flexible and multitask design was developed together with André Toselo from the Campinas Agronomy Institute, for customers who could not afford to buy several machines. This first locally designed tractor began to be manufactured in 1948, and its name was Toro (a merger of the names Toselo and Romi). Only the engine was imported. It was a hit at the industrial fair at the Água Branca Park, and did very well in the homologation tests carried out by the São Paulo government and by the Rio de Janeiro Universidade Rural.

During the first months of 1949, Américo Emílio Romi, Zeno Rodrigues Maia, and Domingos Finamore decided to create a

newspaper worthy of a rapidly developing city. Unable to reach an agreement as to its name, they wrote suggestions on pieces of paper and left it up to luck. The name suggested by Emílio was chosen: *Jornal d'Oeste*, which would be released in July that year.

Speaking to the newspaper in November, Emílio showed his enthusiasm with regards to the Toro, which plowed 2.42 hectares in a little less than eight hours, consuming less than forty-five liters of fuel, leading to an excellent cost-benefit ratio for both short and long terms.

"Hence, the certainty that we can be useful to these real constructors of our national economy, the agricultural workers."

But the situation was difficult, and Emílio met with the Minister of Agriculture.

"What do you want?" the man asked.

"You know, foreign tractors enter the country easily, they don't pay rights, they don't pay customs, and for them the dollar is subsidized."

"So that's what you want? Subsidies?"





*Lanz-Bulldog type tractor.
To the left of the tractor, Emílio,
Carlos, and Israel Pinheiro.
To the right, Giordano, Pascoal Pano,
and engineer Carone, 1949*

"We don't want anything for us! We want the government to support the initiative, to facilitate financing for farmers, with reasonable payback periods and interest rates. Brazilian farmers are conservative; they will never buy a national tractor. They will always give preference to American tractors. Extend lines of credit for smaller farmers to be able to mechanize their properties."

The Minister was cold and straight to the point:

"You are wrong. Brazil is not a tractor manufacturer. We already import them, the best! Have a good day!"

Production was discontinued. Emílio returned to Santa Bárbara, commenting:

"*Santo Dio!* Can I be wrong?!"

No, he was right, just ahead of his time. He called his friend Dedini, in Piracicaba:

"Mário, I've got tons of scrap here, good for the furnace. . ."

Later, he couldn't bear to see the train full of carcasses, axles, tractor gears. When they began to load it, he turned his back, which was now slightly curved, and left. Sadness fed his long-time gastritis. The subject was dead, the illusion buried.

Emílio established the following principle: in order for a man to be useful to himself, to his family, and to his parents, he needs to know more, because only then will he be worth more; nonetheless, in order to be able to receive more knowledge, he must be healthy. In 1947, the Romi

Caixa Beneficente was instituted, the predecessor of current health plans. Employees could participate, on their own will, paying 1 percent of their wages. The company would contribute with an amount equivalent to 2 percent of the associate's wages. The idea evolved until, ten years later, it was transformed into the Fundação Romi.

Meanwhile, Olímpia and Emílio left for Italy, which they hadn't seen since long gone 1924. They did not go to Siena or to Rapolano Terme, where Emílio's mother and father had been born, but later Emílio donated an organ to the Rapolano church, receiving honors from the *paese*.

Back in Brazil, they returned to their intense daily routine. Olímpia visited mothers-to-be, gave them gifts, found out what they needed. She was well informed and read the newspapers. Emílio would only pick up the *O Estado de S. Paulo* daily, browse through the economy section, and leave. As always, what he liked was to meander through the workshops, patios, and warehouses. He knew the employees, talked to them, demanded of them, reprimanded them, and taught them.

Following Romi's expansion and the modernization of the country itself, Santa Bárbara seemed destined to become an industrial hub. More and more families arrived swelling the population. However, there was a lack of schools, housing, doctors, roads, sewers, and water. The

*Emílio campaigning with his
adviser, Dirceu Dias Carneiro
(to the left), 1951*

flooding of the Toledos stream brought clouds of mosquitoes. These were problems that required urgent solutions.

As a successful administrator known throughout the country, it was inevitable that Emílio was drawn into politics. In his unending trips, he was constantly in touch with the government hierarchy; he had access to secretaries, mayors, ministers, and bankers. He was the perfect man for the City Hall.

In 1951, political leaders decided for Emílio's candidacy, but it wasn't easy to convince him. They discussed, negotiated, and appealed to his civic spirit.

Emílio took the issue home. Olímpia was horrified, and didn't even want to hear about it.

"Politicians?! We never were and will never be! We don't need them!"

But she ended up backing down:

"We cannot forget that the city took us in with open arms. As it is inevitable, I will give my contribution."

As usual, she stayed firmly in the rear guard.

The party ticket brought together totally antagonistic trends such as the pro-Vargas PTB and oppositionist UDN, and Emílio raised 1,674 votes against his opponent's 499. Deputy mayor was the physician and friend Domingos Finamore.

Inauguration took place on January 1, 1952. Nationalist Getúlio Vargas had resumed the presidency of Brazil a year before, this time by popular vote. Nogueira Garcez was state governor.



In Santa Bárbara, Emílio began by implementing an administrative reform, creating departments to speed up processes.

Water rationing was commonplace. Only the downtown area had a decent supply; the outskirts depended on wells. However, in September, understandings with the Caixa Econômica Estadual state bank led to a large loan enabling the construction of a 640,000-liter reservoir; the laying of ten kilometers of piping, installation of a treatment station, pumps, and hydrometers. By the end of Emílio's term, the whole city was well supplied.

A highway was fundamental. Santa Bárbara was isolated, with precarious access. For Emílio, who was used to private initiative, it was difficult to work with the limitations of the public sector; especially when there was so much to be done. He became extremely impatient with red-tape imbroglios and was frequently arbitrary. Accompanied by a worker, he walked through the municipality driving in small flags where the highway was supposed to pass, saying:

"It is here!"

He would do that even on land yet to be appropriated. He would fight and sometimes come to an understanding, or not. He had a brand-new Studebaker, which he drove through the sugarcane plantations, mud, and holes until he almost destroyed it.

He needed equipment. He requested it, but there wasn't any. He went to the DER [Highway Department] in Campinas:

"I have to open roads and fix roads, but without machines it's impossible."

"You don't even want to know, we are in the same situation..."

Emílio looked through the window:

"But what about those tractors? And those machines?"

"They're out of order. They're imported, there are no spare parts."

"No? Give them to me then!"

He took them and fixed them at Romi, and they opened the highway to Capivari, Rio das Pedras, Monte Mor. They restored secondary roads to ranches, farms, and mills. They delimited

Previous page: Construction of the Santa Bárbara–Capivari Highway, 1950s. Emílio is on the right

Right: Visit by Governor Lucas Nogueira Garcez (on the left of Emílio) Below: New Jersey machinery tools auction in 1946. Carlos is on the first row, to the left





the urban zone with a master plan, particularly to control the many abusive projects to divide land into lots. They opened the Avenida Monte Castelo. They started the construction of the sewer system. Now, a who cesspit filtered and transformed waste into fertilizer, which became a source of income.

They were installing a sewage network, and the laborers were freelance daily workers. Then, they ran out of piping. It had been purchased, but it was taking a long time to be delivered. Meanwhile, in order not to layoff the personnel or pay them wages while they were not working, Emílio put the teams on undertakings around the stream. However, a councilman made an accusation in São Paulo, stating that the mayor was deviating funds, because cash from one undertaking could not be used for another. An inspector arrived, and Emílio explained the situation. The inspector answered:

“But there was an accusation, it’s the law, imagine if everyone decided to do the same thing... The councilman will keep on insisting...”

“Let me tell you something, if that councilman entered the pipe, it would infect the sewer?!” said Emílio, who sometimes had a short temper: “Do I stop everyone and pay them for doing nothing? Do I fire them? Do I delay the undertaking?”

He ended up winning the dispute.

Agreements with CPFL [the São Paulo Company of Light and

Power] supplied electric power to the majority of the villages. They sped up the construction of schools and on a piece of land donated by the Companhia Industrial e Agrícola Santa Bárbara, they began building the Secondary School and the Teacher Training College, which would later be called Emílio. When Jânio Quadros took office as governor of São Paulo, the Secondary School was halfway built. By order of the new administration, the state Department of Finance was not allowed to release funds to finish it. Emílio paid for it from his own pocket, guaranteeing:

“One day they will pay me back. I just can’t stop now! If I stop, it will never be finished.”

He went ahead like that until government money began to flow in again and they reimbursed him.

During his term, the municipality’s nominal income grew by 80 percent. At the end of 1955, when he left the City Hall, the city had almost thirty thousand inhabitants and was totally urbanized, ready for the future.

Emílio had already been granted Catholic benefices *in commendam* from the Order of St. Mary of Bethlehem, and people started to call him “Commander,” but he didn’t give the title much importance. He resumed his activities in the company, where the following year he would see a dream come true. After all, what was Américo Emílio Romi if not a workshop of dreams, with his active and keen mind?



THE FIRST BRAZILIAN AUTOMOBILE

Leafing through an Italian magazine, extremely interested, Chiti read and reread an article about a recently launched small car; the Isetta, which fit like a glove on an idea that he and Emílio had been nurturing—to manufacture a cheap, economic, utilitarian vehicle. Especially, a vehicle that was accessible to low-income people, increasing the national market and wealth. There was a new atmosphere in Brazil, open to experimentation and daringness. It was fertile ground on which to sow seeds.

The Isetta had been born out of a concept arrived at by aviation engineer Ermenegildo Pretti and his assistant Pierluigi Raggi. The first prototypes began to circulate in 1952. They were manufactured by Iso Rivolta in Bresso, a province of Milan. In 1953, the company launched the Isetta, a name which means “Small Iso.” Pretti used all his aerodynamic knowledge on the car. The design, which was finalized by Giovanni Michelotti, was revolutionary, in the shape of a drop of water. It had a striking feature: a single front door. The Isetta seated two people; and with a little squeeze, three. It was 2.25 meters long by 1.40 meters wide, with a tubular chassis and steel bodywork, weighing

330 kilograms. The two-cylinder engine had only one combustion chamber (two-stroke, 236-cc), developing 9.5 HP. It had very low consumption: thirty kilometers per liter.

The rear width was less than half the frontal width. It had a double-chain transmission, and as the drive wheels were close to each other, there was no need for a differential. It had four gears forward and one reverse. The vehicle was low maintenance and could handle even the worst roads, in any weather.

Extremely robust, two Isettass participated in the 1954 1,000-Mile rally and achieved a result considered incredible: seventy-nine kilometers per hour; a higher average than the OM, winner of the first edition of the series. The car was highly successful in Western Europe, especially in Germany, where BMW would manufacture thousands of units.

Chiti suggested:
 “Why don’t we import one or two Isettass?”
 The old curiosity and daringness that was embedded in the family genes. They wanted to see how the car had



*Family lunch, 1950s
Further below: A racing Romi-Isetta,
fine-tuned by Emílio Comino for
driver Neville Hoff*



been built, part by part. Nothing seemed impossible for these two men. They had learnt to build plows, lathes, and tractors that way, why not automobiles?

In June 1955, Emílio and Chiti went to Europe. In the plane, Emílio felt sick and had strong pains in his chest. He thought it was the gastritis that so exasperated him. He was examined in Milan, and the doctors found out he had had a minor heart attack. The doctors obliged him to check in the hospital. Chiti went to negotiate with Iso and obtained a concession to manufacture the car in Brazil.

Emílio was recommended not to travel by plane, so they returned to Brazil by ship. They embarked on the *Augusto c* and arrived on August 27. The next day, the *Diário de S. Paulo* daily headline blared: "The first locally manufactured car will be launched by the end of the year." Photographs showed Emílio smiling and well. The name of the future vehicle would be Romi-Isetta.

The country was undergoing a transition period since Vargas' suicide, which had taken place in August 1954. In the October 1955 presidential elections, the charismatic candidate from Minas Gerais, Juscelino Kubitschek, with his contagious smile, was victorious. JK had a developmentalist platform, with a key role for accelerated industrialization, especially within the automotive sector. For this he attracted foreign capital through tax benefits and exemptions. Results were impressive: industrial production, minus inflation, grew 80 percent by 1961; and as far as the transport materials industry was concerned, 600 percent.

However, when this policy still hadn't produced any fruit and other manufacturers continued in their study phase, a product emerged that would soon seduce the public's taste and the media. It's true that it wasn't possible to commercialize the Romi-Isetta already in 1955. It was necessary to reequip the plant (which, however, continued to have lathes as its core activity), solve the sophisticated material supply issue (such as aluminum and Plexiglas) in an incipient supplier market, and introduce much more rigorous norms and standards than the usual ones for the Brazilian market up to then. It would be yet another challenge for Emílio, Chiti, Giordano, Álvares, Romeu, and the many collaborators and friends of Romi.

*Romi-Isettas in front of the Santos
Dumont Airport, Rio de Janeiro*





And yet another victory.

On June 30, 1956, Emílio and Olímpia woke up early as usual, had their breakfast, got ready and went to the plant. It was a party atmosphere.

“Congratulations, ‘Commander’!” hailed the workers.

They went to the assembly warehouse. Emotion and expectation. Chiti pointed to the end of the production line. Emílio lost his voice.

In front of them, Romi-Isetta #1.

Hands clapping. Emílio was moved, paralyzed with contentment. Chiti was euphoric, feeling his heart racing. Emílio and Olímpia entered the car and he closed the (only) door, hit the ignition, and rode around the warehouse.

The applause continued. The first truly Brazilian car had been launched.

Market prowess was to follow technical prowess. Chiti, together with his secretary, Mário Pacheco Fernandes, orchestrated a publicity and promotional campaign that turned the Romi-Isetta into a fad. On September 5, there was a triumphant parade of the little cars in downtown São Paulo (an event that, for the following months, was repeated in various other large cities). Ten days later, they had already

sold 540 units. In October, magazines and newspapers started publishing ads with the slogan that still brings back good memories: *The good side of life is inside a Romi-Isetta*.

The demand and repercussion surpassed all expectations. Enthused, Romi announced that, in 1957, it would also manufacture pickups and vans, with the same simplicity and economic features. Also in 1957, Romi-Isetta would make its debut in the movies. That year, Anselmo Duarte and Odete Lara starred in the romantic comedy *Absolutamente certo*, which was a great hit. In the movie, Odete's car was a Romi-Isetta, which ended up being one of the great attractions.

Romi-Isetta's stage career was far from over: It was to appear in Mazaropi films and also in a TV series. Marketing that was extremely successful.

In 1957, Romi's capital was approximately one billion cruzeiros. The previous year, the company had a turnover of approximately 350 million, having sold more than two thousand lathes, or 85 percent of the total manufactured in Brazil, always introducing technological innovation. In the Santa Bárbara facilities, nine hundred workers and 150 supervising technicians were at work in an area of twenty-three thousand square meters with 250 operational machines.





FUNDAÇÃO ROMI

In 1957, in an unprecedented gesture, Emílio and Olímpia donated their entire equity to the Fundação Romi [Romi Foundation]. They had just created it, and it would become Emílio's pride and joy. On June 29, everyone gathered to hear him deliver his colloquial and easy-going speech. He started with the Christian parable of the boss who went on a trip and called his two servants, giving each a portion of gold for them to keep or multiply. The first buried his portion and didn't work, nor did he plant anything; with nothing to do, he lived off charity. The other worked hard, planted, raised sheep, filled his barn, and made his portion of gold multiply itself. The boss returned and saw the inertia of the first servant and asked for his money back. From the other, who was active and competent, the boss asked nothing, compensating him further with freedom.

The foundation resulted from the ten years of experience with the Caixa Beneficente. Now, Emílio recognized:

"I went down the same path. The Lord entrusted me with something, and entrusted my sons, and my colleagues.

I do not say servants, I say colleagues. We worked long days together, and here's the result, now, the Lord says to his servant, to my colleagues: 'Here is your portion, so that this Foundation may serve as a haven for those that need it—for the poor child, the widow, the orphan, and the cripple. And funds for those that are born, those that die, those that study, for sport, for learning a trade, and for the future ability to defend themselves in life...'"

Previous page: Inauguration of the Senai Learning Center, a Fundação Romi undertaking, 1958

Senai Learning Center, 1958





Previous page: John Herbert and Eva Wilma, Romi-Isetta publicity couple in the late 1950s

Carlos and Emilio, 1950s



IN LIFE, ONE HAS TO TRY

Year 1958 arrived, and the Romi-Isetta continued to be the topic of the day, it was everywhere. In January, Emílio, Chiti, and Romeu led a caravan comprised of thirty-three of these vehicles, which, driven by celebrities such as Anselmo Duarte, went from São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro, where they were welcomed by Mayor Negrão de Lima and many more celebrities. It was an enormous success.

Nobody contributed more than the couple, Eva Wilma and John Herbert, to publicize the Romi-Isetta. At that time, they were on TV in the series *Alô, Doçura* and were loved by the public. For such a lovable car, there could be no better publicity people.

People were getting used to spotting them in the streets; they were smart, able to use any little space to park. Women loved to be flirted riding one. Once again the concept “if

it's Brazilian, it's not good” was obliterated, which had always been instilled by interests other than those of Brazilians. And, if in the beginning the Romi-Isetta was 70 percent national, this rate was constantly growing, with components not only made by Romi, but also by Saturnia (batteries), Sueden (springs), Tecnogeral (chassis and bodywork), Amortex (shock absorbers), Same (electrical material), Orion (rubber parts), Blindex (windshield), Djalma (windscreen wipers), Probel and Plexon (seats and upholstery), and Pirelli (tires).

Chiti moved to São Paulo and married Suzana. He moved into a rented house. Emílio realized that the majority of the family lived in the same way. Then, Chiti remembered the vast almost vacant piece of land next to the plant. Ever since 1946, a village had been built there for senior employees, twenty houses down two lanes. In reality, it was a park with endogenous

Rodando à frente do progresso

Surge para o orgulho de todos os brasileiros



ROMI-Isetta

- O primeiro automóvel de fabricação nacional !

Prodotto no Brasil sob licença de: ISO-S.p.A. - Brescia - Milano

Previous page:
Romi-Isetta advertisement

Romi design department

vegetation, plus animals such as pacas, capybaras, agouties, deer, leopard cats, turtles, macaws, parrots, and other species that Emílio had put there. Chiti suggested: Why not build houses on the highest part for the Romi family? They went further than that and erected a mixture of kibbutz and modern-day condo. There was also a guest house, service area, swimming pools, and tennis courts. Chiti defined the architectural style—modernist—and summoned Italian artist Poletti to make sculptures, paintings, and a stained-glass window. At the time, the famous painter Rebolo had a house-painting company, and it was that company that painted the interior of the houses.

Thus, Vila Romi was born. In January 1959, Romeu told his father they would soon be moving there. Emílio answered:

"No, son, I'm not going to live here... This is not for me..."

Romeu was shocked at his father's melancholy and pe-remptory tone.



In June 1958, Emílio went to Europe, mixing labor and leisure. He went with Olímpia, Chiti, and Julieta. He went to Germany, to BMW, to discuss details of the Romi-Isetta and new contracts. He went to Italy to see machines and revisit Brescia, passing through Pistoia, Bologna, and Ravenna. The lathes made by the company were already exported to fifty-three countries, and the Romi-Isetta was circulating throughout Brazil. At the beginning of 1959, it was already 78 percent nationalized. However, even if it was manufactured up to 1961, the project was doomed, and the Romis were aware of it.

From the calm and cold perspective of many decades later, Chiti explains that the government guidelines themselves made production unfeasible. Vehicles with a capacity for less than four passengers had been excluded from major tax, foreign exchange, and financial benefits extended to others. For example, all other automakers were allowed to procure

Máquinas Agrícolas Romi façade, 1950s

*Facing page: Emilio and Olímpia
(left) in Madonna del Tufò, Italy, 1958*



foreign currency without limitation, at a rate of forty cruzeiros per dollar; whereas Romi was obliged to pay from 230 to 250 per dollar in auctions for the American currency. Under those circumstances, the competition imported 60-70 percent of the vehicle content that they produced, at a cost well below the 18 percent still imported to make a Romi-Isetta. Merit was being punished.

Was Emílio devastated? No. But there was that uncomfortable sensation of being in a deep and comfortable sleep and waking up to have reality slapping you in the face. But the experience was gratifying. And, today Chiti gives an overall view of the moment being experienced in Brazil:

“We were right when we wanted to start manufacturing cars, thinking in terms of modest proportions and low consumption. What we see today are more compact cars and an increasing concern regarding the gasoline issue, oil,

and alternative solutions. Fifty years ago we were advancing through time.”

There was the certainty that the initiative had stimulated others. After all, it was proven that it was possible to manufacture a modern Brazilian car, which brought economy and quality together. And the Romi-Isetta cult remained. In the eyes of the many people that still admire it, it is a small car whose garage is the heart.

The company was fine-tuned. Of the children, only Julieta didn't work at Romi (later on, she would have her own business along with her children). Administrator Emílio always sought to instill concepts that continue to fit perfectly well nowadays: (1) never find yourself in a position in which you need government help; (2) never get loans from a bank—the interest rate will lead you to bankruptcy; (3) be careful with cash flow; the company may be solid and have exceptional





*The Romi Family: Standing, Julieta, Giordano, Romeu, Carlos, and Álvares; inside the Romi-Isetta, Olímpia and Emilio, 1950s
Below: Carlos Chiti leaves for France, Italy, and Germany, 1957*

Facing page: In Campinas, the small car meets the most popular transport of the time—trams, which would vanish from the streets of the city



equity, but if it doesn't have cash to cover its immediate obligations, any Tom, Dick, or Harry can file for your bankruptcy...

Haunted by his gastritis, he stopped eating meat, preferring vegetables and fruit. He continued to work as always. He almost never stayed in his small, austere office. His place was amongst the machines, still full of projects. In order to implement them, he did as he had always done throughout his entire life: he would gather together key personnel, talk to them, induce them subtly, until they were convinced that the idea had come from themselves. His sons would get exasperated:

"But, Dad, the merit is yours!"

And he would answer, astutely:

"Nobody likes to obey orders only. Turn your colleagues into coparticipants, make them also accountable, because the idea is good and I want it well done. If each person believes that the idea came from themselves, they will give their best. Only that way will they do their utmost to achieve success. That's what I want.





Emilio, 1940s

SADNESS

Friday, March 13, 1959. Around 9 P.M., Olímpia saw her husband agitated, avid, running his hand through his head.

“Is it the gastritis?”

“I don’t know. I feel strange in the head, dizziness. It’s a strange sensation, I don’t feel well. I’m anxious.”

“Is there a problem at the plant?”

“Just the usual. It’s here inside, something bothering me.”

“I’m going to call the doctor.”

“I don’t think that’s necessary, it will pass. Let’s wait a little more.”

Olímpia remembered the trip in 1955, when his heart faltered on the flight to Italy. Now, they were alone at home. Concerned, she had someone call Álvares. He arrived and talked to his father. Emílio calmed down and decided to lie down. His son went home.

Romeu had traveled to visit his fiancée Anna Maria, in Piracicaba. He returned round about 11 P.M. and saw

that his mother was shaken and concerned. She explained what had happened.

“Your father didn’t feel well, it seemed serious...”

“Didn’t you call the doctor?”

“We were going to, but the crisis passed. But he still isn’t right.”

Emílio was curled up quietly in bed. He turned to face Romeu, who saw how pale he was.

“How are you?”

“Better.”

“Let’s call the doctor.”

“It will pass, it will pass. It’s just weariness, I’m no longer a young man and I sometimes forget it.”

“Do you feel any pain?”

“No, no pain. Just a nagging sensation. I don’t know what it is.”

Nagging. It was Emílio’s typical lack of patience. They talked for a while and suddenly, Emílio couldn’t speak. He tried to articulate,

but his voice wouldn't come out. His expression was questioning, frightened. His son ran to the living room. It was 11:30 P.M.

"He had another crisis, it seems serious. I'm going to fetch Dr. Felício!"

Dr. Felício Fernandes Nogueira lived nearby. They were back quickly, and the doctor went to examine Emílio.

"We'd better take him to the hospital, to see what is happening."

"And...?"

Olímpia was about to ask something. Santa Bárbara wasn't very well equipped medically.

"Let's go to Campinas," said Dr. Felício.

They called the Campinas Beneficência Hospital, whose director, José Aboim Gomes, was a friend. It took some time to locate him, and they asked for an ambulance. They were only able to leave at 8 A.M. Álvares contacted all the other siblings.

Traffic was light. Lying down on the gurney without being able to speak, Emílio had brief instances of lucidity. The ambulance would accelerate, slow down, and then speed up again, once in a while turning on the siren.

Romeu looked at his mother; then at his father. All of a sudden, he remembered the conversation at Vila Romi a few months before. Had Emílio felt that the end was near?

Olímpia watched her husband. He opened his eyes—did he see her? Emílio closed his eyes again. Downcast, Olímpia prayed. They had been together for forty-two years, through highs and lows, sharing everything. They had reached the bottom of the barrel and then surfaced again. And now, where was he going? Where did Emílio's voice go?

The ambulance stopped, the nurse and Romeu began to remove the gurney. Dr. Aboim called Aderbal Tolosa, a renowned neurologist. They went straight to carry out the

examinations. Very soon Giordano, Carlos, Álvares, Julieta, and her husband João Zanaga arrived. They waited anxiously. Dr. Tolosa returned after what had seemed like an eternity.

"It's serious," he said.

"Very?"

"Cerebral thrombosis. Irreversible."

People started to arrive in small groups and joined the others. There was a feeling of sadness but also of hope—Emílio had overcome so much in his life! When he was at rock bottom, he managed to revert everything. Maybe he could still find that strength? In Santa Bárbara, commotion and unbelief, as if the city was becoming an orphan. The phone lines to Campinas were overloaded all Saturday, friends left for the Beneficência Hospital.

At the ICU, Emílio was not reacting. People remained in silence, no one felt like talking.

At 3 A.M. on Sunday, a nurse entered the room where they were waiting. It wasn't necessary to say anything. The family huddled, Olímpia saw herself embraced. Despite suffering greatly, she maintained her serenity, in charge of the situation. She asked Romeu and her son-in-law to take care of the coffin, Álvares and Giordano to organize the funeral. The body was taken to Santa Bárbara at 8 A.M. Thousands of people were waiting when the car stopped at General Osório, 541, where Emílio lived.

People came from everywhere, the entire city, squeezing on the streets. Round about 2 P.M., the body was taken to the Town Council. Everybody wanted to be one last time with Américo Emílio Romi.

Olímpia was submerged into a situation that made her feel confused and at the same time comforted because the size of her husband's generosity was made evident. Strangers approached, took her hand, and murmured:



“You don’t know who I am, but Seu Emílio gave me a job...”

“Seu Emílio lent me money...”

“Seu Emílio gave me a piece of advice at a time of despair...”

“Seu Emílio financed my house...”

This would still happen for days and months. There were hundreds of people thankful for help, support, or a simple friendly word. Those people shared Olímpia’s pain and that of her family and by dividing, it made the sadness lighter. Emílio was not only a great entrepreneur. He was also a man of small gestures and words that made other people’s lives better. Instead of his setbacks making him a bitter person, they awoke within him a feeling of solidarity.

The funeral procession left at 5 P.M. All that could be heard was the subdued almost rhythmic murmur of the fifteen or twenty thousand mourners. Engraved on his gravestone, the prayer of Saint Francis, Emílio’s favorite.

For it is in giving that we receive.

It is in forgetting that we are found.

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.

It is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

*Previous page:
Emílio at the plant, 1950s*

*The burial, Santa
Bárbara d’Oeste, 1959*





**THAT WHICH WAS TO SERVE ALL
WAS NOT ALLOWED TO WITHER AWAY...**

Olímpia was the first to move into Vila Romi. Then came

Giordano; and Romeu, already married to Anna Maria; and Álvares, who was also already married to Flora Sans and whose first son was called Américo Emílio Romi Neto.

"It's a huge responsibility to bear that name," Olímpia would say affectionately.

She became the matriarch of the Vila. She liked to walk, plant, deal with the gardener, and care for the minimum details. She would occupy herself with lunch, a well-laid table, and absolute rigor with cleanliness. Meal times were sacred. She taught recipes to Dna. Antônia, aka Tonica, who, more than fifty years later, still cooks for the family.

Albeit demanding, Olímpia also allowed her warmth to transpire. One afternoon, looking at the sky, she noticed the clouds.

"Look, it looks like the sky of Tuscany in the winter!" she said to one of her grandchildren, taken by nostalgia. "There are clouds like that there, drawn out... They aren't round like ours..."

Less than a year after Emílio's death, Romi-Isetta experienced its consecration. On February 2, 1960, coming from all parts of the country, Brazilian-made cars arrived at the new capital city—Brasília. It was the National Integration Caravan, welcomed by JK. Under the pouring rain, the president got into a Romi-Isetta, and with the top open, paraded the muddy streets.

"The trip you have just completed is the trip of liberation of our territory," proclaimed the president. "Brazil has cast aside its shackles, its limitations, it has overcome its obstacles and barriers, and has taken on a trip which in itself is the voyage of national encounter."

In what he said, there was also a lot of symbolism for Romi, for the emancipation that—with that small valuable car and, more than anything, the work of decades of development of tooling machinery—the company had represented for Brazil.

In 1962, the company name changed again, this time to its current designation, Indústrias Romi SA. Two years later, more symbolism and more commotion: the National Confederation of Industries granted the first Industrial of the Year Award. The recipient: Américo Emílio Romi, honored posthumously.

Romi forged ahead, always modernizing itself, improving itself, and shaking itself up. There were more of those sad moments, which unfortunately cannot be avoided. Olímpia Gelli Romi passed away in 1972, at seventy-eight years of age. Álvares Romi followed in 2002, also at seventy-eight. And Giordano Romi, in 2005, at eighty-four.

But the legacy remains, the family perseveres, and life renews itself. Today Romi is the largest Brazilian machine tools industry (lathes, turning and machining centers) and

*Pages 108 and 109:
Américo Emílio Romi, 1950s*

*Below: Emílio and grandchild
Américo Emílio Romi Neto
at Vila Romi, 1950s*



The awarding of the Capitães do Progresso trophy, a posthumous homage to Emilio, 1962. From left to right, Romeu, Giordano, Carlos, and Álvares



machines for plastics processing (plastic injection molding machines and blow molding machines). In July 2008, it bought new assets from Italian injector manufacture Sandretto, thereby entering the exclusive list of Brazilian companies with industrial operations abroad.

Banking on the highest quality certifications, and investing approximately 4 percent in R&D of its net operational annual income, it owns more than sixty invention patents and has filed for another thirty. This state-of-the-art knowledge is completed by technological collaboration with global leading companies, such as German company Emag, Japanese Kira, and Italian Colombo Filippetti.

Almost eighty years after the beginning in that modest shack with a dirt floor, the factory facilities are distributed amongst nine units in Santa Bárbara, amounting to more than 140,000 square meters of built area, integrated by latest-generation CAD-CAM systems.

On the internal market, Romi sells its products directly through over thirty sales outlets, spread throughout the main capital cities and industrial hubs, offering a wide range of services and technical assistance, supplying spare parts, and pre- and post-sale engineering. It has also been present on the foreign market since Humberto Mayrink and Herbert Dresbach's trips in 1944. Romi not only has distributors in all the continents, but also subsidiaries in the United States, Italy, and Germany.

It has more than three thousand collaborators, and pursuant to its founder's philosophy, Romi goes on believing that people are the company's greatest asset. This vision remains more alive than ever in the work developed by the Fundação Romi, focused on education and culture, and absolutely free and open to the community.

Vigor, innovation, solidarity.

Yes, Seu Emilio continues to exist everywhere.

Eight decades of innovation and pioneering spirit



The Romi embryo, the Garage Santa Bárbara was founded on June 29

Pioneering spirit in the use of electric welding to manufacture agricultural equipment

New corporate name: Máquinas Agrícolas Romi Ltda.



RCN model launched, first Imor lathe with a Norton transmission

Move to new facilities, at the current Av. Pérola Byington, 56 address, with eight 12,000 m² pavilions



1,700 lathes of various models produced



The first Imor lathe is exported to Argentina

Launching of the NTPN and NTCN Imor lathe models, many of which still operate today



Launching of the Romi-Isetta, the first Brazilian car



Launching of the Imor lathe model MIN, of unheard of quality

A further 50 machine tools bought in England, making it possible to make more precise lathes

Evolution of the name
1930 Garage Santa Bárbara
1938 Máquinas Agrícolas Romi Ltda
1954 Máquinas Agrícolas Romi SA
1962 Indústrias Romi SA
New corporate name: Indústrias Romi SA



From November 14 to 19, Romi participated in the 1st Mechanical Fair, at Ibirapuera



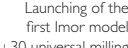
Romi's new São Paulo headquarters inaugurated at Rua Coriolano, 710



Launching of the first extra heavy UT-48 lathe, with an electronic copying system for cylinder lamination



Launching of the HXB model Romi lathe, the only one with continuous speed variation



Launching of the first Imor model U-30 universal milling machine

First 32 kb computer installed at Romi, the only one in the region

Total accumulated production of 41 thousand machines to date, including 5 thousand exported units



Quality castings guarantee machinery durability, and the new foundry is inaugurated, the UF-10



The UT-50 first extra heavy lathe is exported to the USA, for cylinder lamination up to 80 metric tons



Launching of the new Romi model ECN-40 lathe



Golden Jubilee –50 years of struggle and development



Launching of the Romi CNC Galaxy PPL lathe

Total accumulated production of 92 thousand machines to date, including 14 thousand exported units

1930 1934 1935 1938 1940 1941 1942 1943 1944 1946 1947 1948 1949 1950 1951 1953 1956 1957 1959 1960 1961 1962 1966 1967 1968 1969 1970 1972 1973 1974 1976 1978 1979 1980

Inauguration of the first foundry

Romi builds a planer to manufacture lathe bars



Presses, hammers, and drills constructed for own use

Initiation of fabrication of 22 models of agricultural equipment



The Imor brand begins to be used on the machines

Thousandth TP-5 lathe produced



Sixty machine tools were purchased in an auction in the United States, which were more productive and precise, for the new lathe models

Fabrication of the Toro, first Brazilian designed tractor



Accumulated production of 8,200 machines to date, including 1,320 exported units



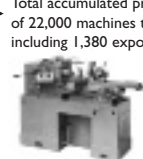
Launching of the Imor lathe model MVN, with a new productivity standard, many examples of which are still in use today



The couple, Américo Emilio and Olímpia, create the Fundação Romi to foment health, education, and leisure



The Romi-Isetta assembly line is established to produce 1,200 units/year



Total accumulated production of 22,000 machines to date, including 1,380 exported units

First Imor TP-100 heavy lathe delivered



Manufacture of the Polimac revolver lathe at the old plant in Santo André (SP)

Indústrias Romi do Nordeste SA inaugurated in Recife

As of 1969, the Imor brand is gradually substituted by the Romi brand

Launching of the s Pilote and Transpilote lathes, first Brazilian typically copiers



Confirming its pioneering spirit, Romi delivers lathe CN model DCE-480, first in Brazil



With the delivery of the first Romi Reed model 300 to 850 plastic injection molding machine, Romi enters the plastics era



Launching of the new logo, with the slogan "The company that already lives tomorrow"

Launching of the new line of Romi 20/30/40 ultramodern design universal lathes, designed by Italian Rodolfo Bonetto

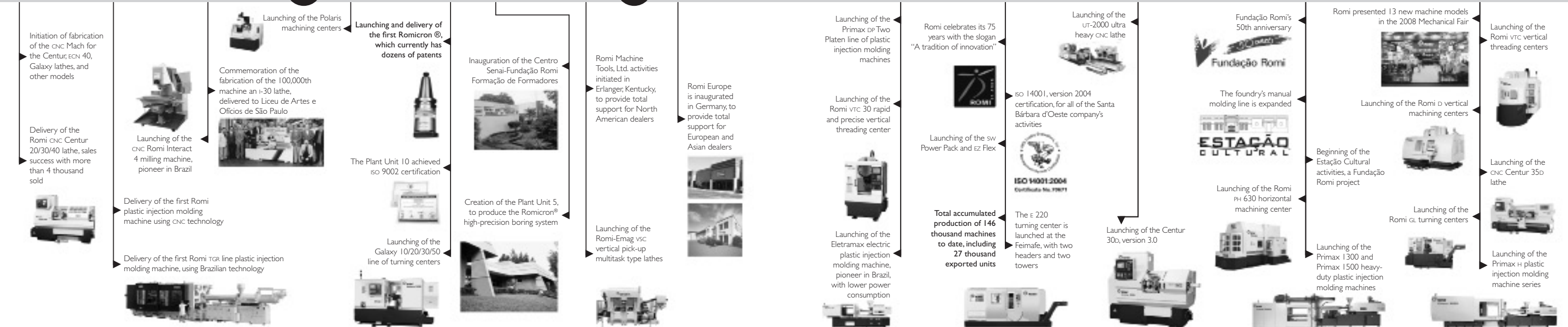


Inauguration of the Plant Unit 15, to increase Romi ilastic injection molding machine production



Inauguration of the Plant Unit 11, to manufacture heavy and extra heavy machines





Publisher

Alexandre Dórea Ribeiro

Executive editor

Andrea M. Santos

Assistant editor

Gustavo Veiga

Art director

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Graphic design

Débora Setton / Estúdio DBA

Copy

Ignácio de Loyola Brandão

English version

Michael Chatwin

Proofreading

Regina Stocklen

Preprinting

Bureau São Paulo

Printing and finishing

Prol Gráfica

Photo credits

Fundação Romi

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Printed in Brazil

Printed in FSC-certified Torraspapel

DBA Dórea Books and Art

Al. Franca, 1185 cj. 31/32 • cep 01422-001

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